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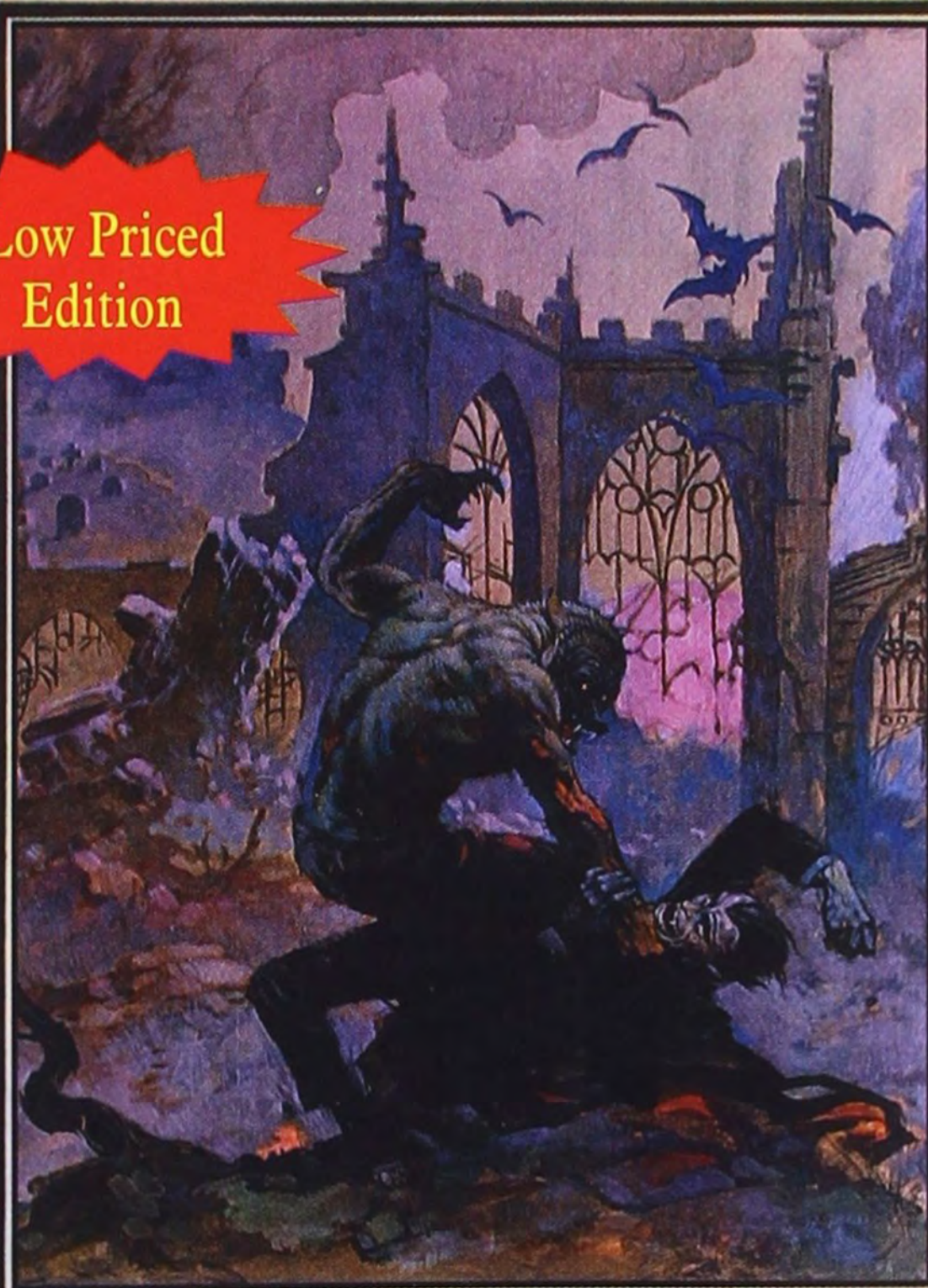


Goodwill's

50 Ghost Stories

Selected by Stefan Dziemianowicz,
Robert H. Weinberg & Martin H. Greenberg

Low Priced
Edition



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Ghost Stories

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GOODWILL PUBLISHING HOUSE™

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Contents

Introduction	vii
Across the Moors <i>by William Fryer Harvey</i>	1
Attorney for the Damned <i>by Renier Wyers</i>	5
Away <i>by Barry Malzberg</i>	13
Behind the Screen <i>by Dale Clark</i>	16
Black Gold <i>by Thorp McClusky</i>	24
Bone to His Bone <i>by E. G. Swain</i>	29
The Burned House <i>by Vincent O'Sullivan</i>	36
Clocks <i>by Darrell Schweitzer</i>	43
The Closed Door <i>by Harold Ward</i>	46
The Coat <i>by A. E. D. Smith</i>	53
The Cold Embrace <i>by Mary E. Braddon</i>	59
Coming Home <i>by Nina Kiriki Hoffman</i>	67
Concert to Death <i>by Paul Ernst</i>	75
The Considerate Hosts <i>by Thorp McClusky</i>	82
Daddy <i>by Steve Rasnic Tem</i>	92
Dark Mummery <i>by Thorp McClusky</i>	95
Date in the City Room <i>by Talbot Johns</i>	103
A Dead Secret <i>by Lafcadio Hearn</i>	107
The Door <i>by Henry S. Whitehead</i>	109
Drowned Argosies <i>by J. Wilmer Benjamin</i>	113
Dust <i>by Edna Goit Brintnall</i>	117
Edge of the Cliff <i>by Dorothy Quick</i>	121
Faces <i>by Arthur J. Burks</i>	124
Fancy That <i>by J. N. Williamson</i>	131
Father Macclesfield's Tale <i>by R. H. Benson</i>	135
The Furnished Room <i>by O. Henry</i>	141
The Garret of Madame Lemoyne <i>by Kirk W. Mashburn, Jr.</i>	147
The Ghost and the Bone-Setter <i>by J. Sheridan Le Fanu</i>	153
A Ghost-Child <i>by Bernard Capes</i>	161
The Ghost Farm <i>by Susan Andrews Rice</i>	167
Ghost Story <i>by Alan Brennert</i>	170
The Ghosts at Haddon-le-Green <i>by Alfred I. Tooke</i>	174
Ghosts of the Air <i>by J. M. Hiatt and Moye W. Stephens</i>	176

Gibbler's Ghost <i>by William F. Nolan</i>	182
A Grammatical Ghost <i>by Elia W. Peattie</i>	186
The Grey Room <i>by Stefan Grabinski</i>	191
Guarded <i>by Mearle Prout</i>	198
Harmless Ghosts <i>by Jessica Amanda Salmonson</i>	203
The Haunted Burglar <i>by W. C. Morrow</i>	209
He Walked by Day <i>by Julius Long</i>	213
Her New Parents <i>by Steve Rasnic Tem</i>	219
Highwaymen <i>by W. Benson Dooling</i>	225
The Honor of Don Pedro <i>by Wallace J. Knapp</i>	229
The House of Shadows <i>by Mary Elizabeth Counselman</i>	236
How He Left the Hotel <i>by Louisa Baldwin</i>	243
Jerry Bundler <i>by W. W. Jacobs</i>	247
John Charrington's Wedding <i>by Edith Nesbit</i>	254
Kharu Knows All <i>by Renier Wyers</i>	260
The Last of Squire Ennismore <i>by Mrs. J. H. Riddell</i>	266
The Light Was Green <i>by John Rawson Speer</i>	272

Introduction

The ghost story is the oldest type of supernatural tale, and thus the one closest to the European oral storytelling tradition. Initially, it was meant to be brief, the better to deliver its thrills to captivated listeners before the tenuous air of suspense had time to dissipate.

Although contemporary ghost fiction sometimes run to novel length, the short-short ghost story continues to entertain readers around the world. The proof can be found in *50 Ghost Stories*, which brings together more than one-and-a-half centuries of compact ghost stories.

A sampling of the contents shows just how widespread the short-short ghost story's appeal is. The earliest (although by no means the first published), Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's "The Ghost and the Bone-Setter," dates from 1838, and the most recent, Donald R. Burleson's "The Pedicab," was written especially for this volume. Although most of these stories were published originally in Great Britain or the United States, Guy Boothby's "A Strange Goldfield" first appeared in Australia, while Stefan Grabinski's "The Grey Room" (originally published in Poland) and Lafcadio Hearn's "A Dead Secret" (written by an American expatriate living in Japan) suggest the familiarity of the form in non-English-speaking countries. Writers who attempted the short-short ghost story include those whose names are synonymous with supernatural fiction (M. R. James, Ramsey Campbell), renowned figures in the literary mainstream (O. Henry, Oscar Wilde), and even authors who professed disdain for the traditional frights of supernatural horror fiction (H. P. Lovecraft).

Part of the reason for this popularity is the great amount of latitude possible within the short-short ghost story's narrow confines. Writers have used the form to explore a variety of human emotions and behaviors: avarice (Renier Wyers's "Attorney for the Damned," August Derleth's "Pacific 421"), revenge (Thorp McClusky's "Black Gold," H. P. Lovecraft's "The Terrible Old Man"), jealousy (Steve Rasnic Tem's "Daddy," constancy of character (Fred Chappell's "Miss Prue," Louisa Baldwin's "How He Left the Hotel"), obligation to duty (H. F. Arnold's "Night Wire"), honor (Ambrose Bierce's "The Stranger," Edith Nesbit's "John Charrington's Wedding"), love

(H. Warner Munn's "A Sprig of Rosemary," Darrell Schweitzer's "Clocks"), infidelity (Mary E. Braddon's "The Cold Embrace"), and family relationships (Al Sarrantonio's "Two").

The short-short ghost story has been used both to deliver reassurance of an afterlife (S. B. Hurst's "The Splendid Lie," Will Charles Ouriler's "Mandolin") and to frighten with the horrors beyond the grave (Jessica Amanda Salmonson's "Harmless Ghosts"). The ghosts themselves can appear in a variety of forms, ranging from figments of memory (Nina Kiriki Hoffman's "Coming Home," Robert Sampson's "Relationships"), to inanimate objects imbued with personality (O. Henry's "The Furnished Room," A. V. Milyer's "Mordecai's Pipe"), fragments (W. C. Morrow's "The Haunted Burglar"), premonitions (Vincent O'Sullivan's "The Burned House," Arthur Gray's "The True History of Anthony Ffryar"), unfulfilled opportunities and expectations (Bernard Capes's "A Ghost-Child"), and projections of the haunted's personality (Clark Ashton Smith's "Thirteen Phantasms"). They can also be put to a variety of uses: comedy (Saki's "The Soul of Laploshka"), social satire (Barry Malzberg's "Away"), moral instruction (Richard Middleton's "On the Brighton Road"), and subjects for both stream of consciousness narrative (Alan Brennert's "Ghost Story") and prose poems (Alfred I. Tooke's "The Ghosts at Haddon-le-Green").

As far as readers are concerned, though, probably the most attractive quality of the short-short ghost story is that it uses a minimum of elements to evoke a powerful response. Just as it is possible to be scared by what you *don't* see, so is it possible to be haunted long after by this briefest of encounters with the supernatural. Fear comes in all shapes and sizes, and although these ghosts are small, they will loom large in your memory.

Stefan Dziemianowicz
New York,

Across the Moors

by William Fryer Harvey

It really was most unfortunate.

Peggy had a temperature of nearly a hundred, and a pain in her side, and Mrs. Workington Bancroft knew that it was appendicitis. But there was no one whom she could send for the doctor.

James had gone with the jaunting-car to meet her husband who had at last managed to get away for a week's shooting.

Adolph, she had sent to the Evershams, only half an hour before, with a note for Lady Eva.

The cook could not manage to walk, even if dinner could be served without her.

Kate, as usual, was not to be trusted.

There remained Miss Craig.

"Of course, you must see that Peggy is really ill," said she, as the governess came into the room, in answer to her summons. "The difficulty is, that there is absolutely no one whom I can send for the doctor." Mrs. Workington Bancroft paused; she was always willing that those beneath her should have the privilege of offering the services which it was her right to command.

"So, perhaps, Miss Craig," she went on, "you would not mind walking over to Tebbits' Farm. I hear there is a Liverpool doctor staying there. Of course I know nothing about him, but we must take the risk, and I expect he'll be only too glad to be earning something during his holiday. It's nearly four miles, I know, and I'd never dream of asking you if it was not that I dread appendicitis so."

"Very well," said Miss Craig, "I suppose I must go; but I don't know the way."

"Oh you can't miss it," said Mrs. Workington Bancroft, in her anxiety temporarily forgiving the obvious unwillingness of her governess' consent.

"You follow the road across the moor for two miles, until you come to Redman's Cross. You turn to the left there, and follow a rough path that leads through a larch plantation. And Tebbits' farm lies just below you in the valley."

"And take Pontiff with you," she added, as the girl left the room.

“There’s absolutely nothing to be afraid of, but I expect you’ll feel happier with the dog.”

“Well, miss,” said the cook, when Miss Craig went into the kitchen to get her boots, which had been drying by the fire; “of course she knows best, but I don’t think it’s right after all that’s happened for the mistress to send you across the moors on a night like this. It’s not as if the doctor could do anything for Miss Margaret if you do bring him. Every child is like that once in a while. He’ll only say put her to bed, and she’s there already.”

“I don’t see what there is to be afraid of, cook,” said Miss Craig as she laced her boots, “unless you believe in ghosts.”

“I’m not so sure about that. Anyhow I don’t like sleeping in a bed where the sheets are too short for you to pull them over your head. But don’t you be frightened, miss. It’s my belief that their bark is worse than their bite.”

But though Miss Craig amused herself for some minutes by trying to imagine the bark of a ghost (a thing altogether different from the classical ghostly bark), she did not feel entirely at her ease.

She was naturally nervous, and living as she did in the hinterland of the servants’ hall, she had heard vague details of true stories that were only myths in the drawing-room.

The very name of Redman’s Cross sent a shiver through her; it must have been the place where that horrid murder was committed. She had forgotten the tale, though she remembered the name.

Her first disaster came soon enough.

Pontiff, who was naturally slow-witted, took more than five minutes to find out that it was only the governess he was escorting, but once the discovery had been made, he promptly turned tail, paying not the slightest heed to Miss Craig’s feeble whistle. And then, to add to her discomfort, the rain came, not in heavy drops, but driving in sheets of thin spray that blotted out what few landmarks there were upon the moor.

They were very kind at Tebbits’ farm. The doctor had gone back to Liverpool the day before, but Mrs. Tebbit gave her hot milk and turf cakes, and offered her reluctant son to show Miss Craig a shorter path on to the moor, that avoided the larch wood.

He was a monosyllabic youth, but his presence was cheering, and she felt the night doubly black when he left her at the last gate.

She trudged on wearily. Her thoughts had already gone back to the almost exhausted theme of the bark of ghosts, when she heard steps on the road behind her that were at least material. Next minute the figure of a man appeared: Miss Craig was relieved to see that the stranger was

a clergyman. He raised his hat. "I believe we are both going in the same direction," he said. "Perhaps I may have the pleasure of escorting you." She thanked him. "It is rather weird at night," she went on, "and what with all the tales of ghosts and bogies that one hears from the country people, I've ended by being half afraid myself."

"I can understand your nervousness," he said, "especially on a night like this. I used at one time to feel the same, for my work often meant lonely walks across the moor to farms which were only reached by rough tracks difficult enough to find even in the daytime."

"And you never saw anything to frighten you—nothing immaterial I mean?"

"I can't really say that I did, but I had an experience eleven years ago which served as the turning point in my life, and since you seem to be now in much the same state of mind as I was then in, I will tell it you."

"The time of year was late September. I had been over to Westondale to see an old woman who was dying, and then, just as I was about to start on my way home, word came to me of another of my parishioners who had been suddenly taken ill only that morning. It was after seven when at last I started. A farmer saw me on my way, turning back when I reached the moor road."

"The sunset the previous evening had been one of the most lovely I ever remember seeing. The whole vault of heaven had been scattered with flakes of white cloud, tipped with rosy pink like the strewn petals of a full-blown rose."

"But that night all was changed. The sky was an absolutely dull slate colour, except in one corner of the west where a thin rift showed the last saffron tint of the sullen sunset. As I walked, stiff and footsore, my spirits sank. It must have been the marked contrast between the two evenings, the one so lovely, so full of promise (the corn was still out in the fields spoiling for fine weather), the other so gloomy, so sad with all the dead weight of autumn and winter days to come. And then added to this sense of heavy depression came another different feeling which I surprised myself by recognising as fear."

"I did not know why I was afraid."

"The moors lay on either side of me, unbroken except for a straggling line of turf shooting butts, that stood within a stone's-throw of the road."

"The only sound I had heard for the last half hour was the cry of the startled grouse—Go back, go back, go back. But yet the feeling of fear was there, affecting a low centre of my brain through some little used physical channel."

"I buttoned my coat closer, and tried to divert my thoughts by thinking of next Sunday's sermon.

"I had chosen to preach on Job. There is much in the old-fashioned notion of the book, apart from all the subtleties of the higher criticism, that appeals to country people; the loss of herds and crops, the break up of the family. I would not have dared to speak, had not I too been a farmer; my own glebe land had been flooded three weeks before, and I suppose I stood to lose as much as any man in the parish. As I walked along the road repeating to myself the first chapter of the book, I stopped at the twelfth verse.

" 'And the Lord said unto Satan: Behold all that he hath is in thy power' . . .

"The thought of the bad harvest (and that is an awful thought in these valleys) vanished. I seemed to gaze into an ocean of infinite darkness.

"I had often used, with the Sunday glibness of the tired priest, whose duty it is to preach three sermons in one day, the old simile of the chess board. God and the Devil were the players: and we were helping one side or the other. But until that night I had not thought of the possibility of my being only a pawn in the game, that God might throw away that the game might be won.

"I had reached the place where we are now, I remember it by that rough stone water-trough, when a man suddenly jumped up from the roadside. He had been seated on a heap of broken road metal.

" 'Which way are you going, guv'ner?' he said.

"I knew from the way he spoke that the man was a stranger. There are many at this time of the year who come up from the south, tramping northwards with the ripening corn. I told him my destination.

" 'We'll go along together,' he replied.

"It was too dark to see much of the man's face, but what little I made out was coarse and brutal.

"Then he began the half-menacing whine I knew so well—he had tramped miles that day, he had had no food since breakfast, and that was only a crust.

" 'Give us a copper,' he said, 'it's only for a night's lodging.'

"He was whittling away with a big clasp knife at an ash stake he had taken from some hedge."

The clergyman broke off.

"Are those the lights of your house?" he said. "We are nearer than I expected, but I shall have time to finish my story. I think I will, for you can run home in a couple of minutes, and I don't want you to be frightened when you are out on the moors again.

"As the man talked he seemed to have stepped out of the very background of my thoughts, his sordid tale, with the sad lies that hid a far sadder truth.

"He asked me the time.

"It was five minutes to nine. As I replaced my watch I glanced at his face. His teeth were clenched, and there was something in the gleam of his eyes that told me at once his purpose.

"Have you ever known how long a second is? For a third of a second I stood there facing him, filled with an overwhelming pity for myself and him; and then without a word of warning he was upon me. I felt nothing. A flash of lightning ran down my spine, I heard the dull crash of the ash stake, and then a very gentle patter like the sound of a far-distant stream. For a minute I lay in perfect happiness watching the lights of the house as they increased in number until the whole heaven shone with twinkling lamps.

"I could not have had a more painless death."

Miss Craig looked up. The man was gone; she was alone on the moor.

She ran to the house, her teeth chattering, ran to the solid shadow that crossed and recrossed the kitchen blind.

As she entered the hall, the clock on the stairs struck the hour.

It was nine o'clock.

Attorney for the Damned

by Renier Wyers

Camberton knew, by the muffled ring, which of his two telephones to pick up. Yet, he hesitated. Who could be calling him at this late hour, on this secret, unlisted wire?

Only six of his underworld clients knew the number. Two of these gentlemen of doubtful integrity had just gone out the door; two were

in Europe, and one in prison. The sixth was Burke Hawtin. But—Burke Hawtin was dead!

The muffled bell rang again. Camberton's pudgy hand closed on the cradled instrument and lifted it to his ear. He said nothing. He never spoke first on this line. Whoever knew the number of it was expected to know also the code word which had to be uttered before Camberton would respond.

Presently the word came: "Reference-room." It was spoken in low, unfamiliar tones.

"Who are you?" rasped Camberton. His round, pasty face was an expressionless mask, save for the glint of suspicion in his beady, fat-encircled eyes.

"A friend of Hawtin's," the unknown whispered. "He gave me this number. Said for me to call it when—when I'm in a jam."

"What's your name?"

"Smith. John Smi—"

"Very unusual," sneered Camberton. "I've never heard it before. I don't know you."

"Wait. You'll know me when you see me."

"Why should I see you?"

"Because I've got plenty of money for legal advice. Are you alone?"

"Yes, I am," drawled Camberton in a bored tone which was belied by the greed in his piggish eyes. "Do you know how to get here?"

"I know everything about you that Hawtin knew. I'll come up the back way—like—like *he* always did. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Horace L. Camberton, criminal lawyer, any way you say it, put down the telephone, leaned back in his chair and looked again at the newspaper item which he had been reading before the interruption. Early that morning, according to the item, Burke Hawtin and two confederates were shot to death while looting the First Industrial Bank of Willow Ridge, a southwestern suburb of Chicago. Hawtin's corpse was identified by the police. The other two had apparently been crime recruits. Their names were as yet unknown.

Camberton's only pang of regret, on reading the item, was in his purse. Hawtin had been a well-paying client; and, although he had not required legal counsel during the past year, he would have, sooner or later, had he not been mowed down.

Perhaps, reflected the attorney, this stranger who had just telephoned would take the place of the dear departed as a source of revenue. However, one couldn't be too sure. It was best to prepare for any kind of a comer.

From his library table, Camberton transferred a loaded revolver to

his right-hand coat-pocket. Then he went into the bedchamber and opened the top drawer of his bureau. From this he took another loaded pistol which he dropped into his left-hand pocket.

He waddled impatiently back and forth in the two rooms which comprised his suite in the Avon Arms Hotel, a receivership skyscraper towering in Diversey Parkway, east of Clark Street. It was a nest of shysters, racketeers, and elegantly clad hoodlums. Ordinarily he felt perfectly at home in this environment, in the shadow of the double-cross, but tonight he was uneasy. Never before had he been so apprehensive of impending trouble as he was now, while awaiting his nocturnal visitor.

Rather than be called upon to open the door and find himself only several inches from his guest, he released the latch, backed across the room and sat down on a straight-backed chair, facing the entrance. Each of his clammy hands was plunged into a pocket, gripping a gun.

"Now," he thought, "if I don't like your looks, Mr. Smith, or whoever, or whatever you are, I'll make you back right out again. Nobody's going to pull a fast one on little Horace."

The knocking he presently heard was stealthy, almost inaudible. But loud and blustering was his response to it.

"Come in!" he shouted.

The door opened silently. A man whose broad shoulders and muscular arms bulged visibly under his tightly draped jacket stepped in and closed the door behind him. His right hand remained in his pocket, as though he, too, was grasping a weapon. With his other hand he tilted the dip-brimmed, summer-felt hat back from his forehead.

"Dernac!" exclaimed Camberton, jumping to his feet. There was no mistaking the name of this visitor. His face was pictured almost daily in the newspapers. He was Anton ("Tony") Dernac, widely publicized as America's Public Enemy Number One.

"So you do know me, after all," the stranger grunted, defiantly jutting out his jaw. "And you know there's a reward of twenty-five grand on my hide. But"—his pocketed hand lifted the coat slightly—"don't think you'll collect it. Besides, I can more than double the ante—if you'll work on my side."

Camberton's fat, greedy face broke into an oily grimace which he believed was a cordial smile. "Let's be friends," he said, extending a welcoming hand.

Dernac grinned out of the side of his mouth as he grasped the lawyer's flabby fingers in his own ham-like fist. "Okay. Now you're my mouthpiece and you'd better be a good one. That's what I need."

"You need a drink, too, my boy."

The two men sat down facing each other and talked; that is to say, Dernac talked. Camberton merely listened and watched his guest down one drink after another from the whisky bottle which the lawyer had placed on a convenient magazine table. Camberton, at the same time, simulated just the proper degree of sympathetic understanding. He was adept at it. It was in this way that he came to know so many things which necessitated such under-cover equipment as the secret telephone.

Dernac, the hunted, seemed eager to unburden himself to the attorney. For all his bulk and reputation as a hard hombre, he was plainly frightened. He had achieved too much notoriety for his peace of mind. Having lived by the gun he apparently feared death by the gun. Every man's hand was against him. He poured himself yet another drink and said:

"I met Hawtin in Minneapolis, about six months ago. He joined my gang and we did several jobs, payroll raids in St. Louis. The last one there wasn't so good. Three of my boys were killed."

"I remember reading about that," remarked Camberton, "but I didn't know that Hawtin was there—or you either."

"Nobody knows it, now. Hawtin and the other two were killed this morning." The bandit licked his lips. "I almost went along—but I had a hunch. Besides, why should I take any chances when I've got more than a hundred grand salted away? Part of it was Hawtin's. But he's dead and the rest of the mob that ain't dead is in jail. So there's nobody left to split with—exceptin' you. How much will it cost me to get out of the country?"

Camberton's porcine eyes narrowed as he looked at his visitor. Was it really possible for such a hulking lout to retain so much loot? Would he give up half, three-quarters of it to save his skin? The attorney was confident that both questions could be answered in the affirmative.

"It'll be a hard job," he said. "Your picture, given to the police by that dame you ditched, is being printed so often, nowadays, that your face is as well known as Babe Ruth's. Your mug and description are posted in every police chief's office, in every detective bureau and agency in the country—and in every post-office."

"That's just it. Even people who only look like me are getting arrested and shot at!" cried Dernac. "What chance have I got?"

"A good chance," said Camberton, watching his client closely. "But, as I said, it'll be a hard job—and expensive. There will be certain preliminary costs. First of all, I'd have to hire someone to do a little

plastic surgery on that well-known face of yours. Then, too, I'd have to pay for 'fixing' aids along the route you're to take and—"

"Hell!" exclaimed Dernac; "if you're worried about my bein' able to pay—here's twenty-five grand for a starter." He reached into his breast pocket and tossed a packet of greenbacks into the attorney's lap. "And remember, there's more than a hundred grand where that came from. It's all safe and snug under the floor of the Ideal Shoe Repair Shop, just a few blocks from here." He hiccupped. Then, loosening his tongue with another drink of whisky, he rambled on: "Yeah, I own the Ideal Shoe Repair Shop. The old shoemaker who's supposed to own it is just a stooge for me. He learned cobbling in the penitentiary."

"Does he know the money's there?"

"Ha, ha! Not much! Old Fred Miller's too dumb to ever know anything important. All he knows is that I sometimes used the joint for business meetings with Hawtin and the boys. I always sent Miller out with enough money to get drunk on. Other times he sleeps there. I chased him out tonight, figgerin' that me and you might take a walk over there after a while and settle our deal."

Mere slits now, the criminal lawyer's greedy eyes flashed from the money to Dernac. Camberton thought fast. How much money would it be worth to risk disbarment, perhaps prison, if anything went wrong in smuggling his client out of the United States? The problem caused a frown to crease his round bland face.

Like a flash an easy solution suggested itself. He leered sinisterly at Dernac. Startled, the fugitive reached for his gun, but the lawyer, with a speed surprizing in one so fat and flabby, whipped out his own pistol and fired before the other could take aim.

Public Enemy Number One toppled from the chair, a bullet in his head.

With a deep breath of satisfaction, inhaling a whiff of gunpowder smoke, Camberton noted that his victim's lifeless hand still held a revolver. It would make the story of self-defense more dramatic. He arose, hurriedly put the packet of greenbacks in the wall-safe, leaving the door open, cleared away the whisky and glasses, and then picked up the telephone—the one connected with the hotel switchboard.

"Send for the police," he said calmly. "I've just shot a burglar. He looks like Tony Dernac."

Police officers, reporters, and hotel employees crowding into the suite a few moments later heard his thrilling narrative of how, upon returning from a stroll, he had caught Dernac in the act of ransacking the wall-safe.

"He rushed at me, his gun leveled at my heart. But I was quicker on the trigger."

"Ever see him before?" asked a police sergeant.

"Never. My guess as to his identity was based on press pictures I've seen."

"Gosh, Mr. Camberton," blurted one of the reporters. "You'll get the twenty-five thousand dollar reward!"

"That's so. I hadn't thought of it. I was merely trying to protect my life and property. I'll agree that perhaps I do deserve some reward for having rid society of a dangerous killer."

Highly pleased with himself, the lawyer then posed for innumerable newspaper photographs. He posed pointing his gun at the camera, pointing his finger at the wall-safe, shaking hands with the sergeant, shaking hands with the hotel manager, with bellhops, with chambermaids, with almost everyone excepting his dead victim. He obliged the cameramen willingly—refusing only the request of one who wanted him to stand with one foot resting on the corpse, in the manner of a big-game hunter. This, the attorney declared, would be beneath his dignity.

Not until the dark hour just before the dawn was he left alone. Excitedly he turned the leaves of his telephone directory, seeking the address of the Ideal Shoe Repair Shop. Here it was, "692 Elwell Court." Less than four blocks away! He patted the revolvers in his pockets, took an electric torch from his bureau, put on his hat and went out, leaving the building by a rear stairway.

Although only a few blocks from the brightly lighted corner of Clark and Broadway, Elwell Court was a shabby little side-street of dismal, frame shanties. Bleakest of these was number 692 with "Shoe Repairing" crudely lettered on the glass of the front door. It was hardly a place you would suspect of being the depository of a hundred thousand dollars in cash. Camberton, however, was confident that he would find this sum. He knew his crooks and had correctly judged Dernac as the simpleton that he was. The fool hadn't even put a modern lock on the door. Camberton's skeleton key opened it easily.

Inside, he observed that the weakened rays of a distant street lamp penetrated the grimy front windows just enough to cast a dim and eery light, blocked out here and there by machinery and furnishings which cast grotesque and misleading shadows. Feeling his way, he stepped forward. His shin encountered something in the dark—something that sprang through the air with a hissing spitting sound. Two yellow eyes glared balefully at him. He flashed his torch at it and cursed under his

breath at the cat that arched its back in the glare. He threw the beam around the room to get his bearings.

There was a door at the rear of the shop. Camberton regarded it apprehensively as he put out the light. What if old Miller, who, according to Dernac, sometimes slept in the rear of the shop, had returned? The lawyer decided to look into that back room before searching for the loot.

Tiptoeing forward, he placed his hand on the door-knob. As he turned it, slowly and silently, a strange fear gripped him. It was unusual; for, though he was not the bravest man in the world, he was certainly not one to be frightened by darkness and the angrily gleaming eyes of a cat. The touch of terror was caused by something else, he knew not what. It angered him.

Forgetting his caution, he jerked the door open. An icy draft swept round him, enveloping him so completely that he shivered with intense cold. There was something wrong about this, too, this chill on a warm, July night. It required all his will-power to stop the quivering of his fatty flesh as he stared into the room: it was better lighted than the other. The illumination which streamed through the window came from the rear porch light of a house next door.

Camberton's nervous scrutiny sweeping the room was halted and held by an object in the darkest corner. It seemed to be the figure of a man lying on a cot. So! That old cobbler, Miller, had come back to sleep off his drunkenness here! But the odor that assailed Camberton's nostrils was not of alcohol. It was of something equally familiar, something that did not belong here. Sniffing to clear his nostrils and at the same time firmly grasping his revolver, Camberton started to slink toward the recumbent form, then stood stock-still, wide-eyed with fright.

The figure on the cot was sitting up—and it wasn't the figure of an old man. It was the husky, broad-shouldered figure of Tony Dernac, America's Public Enemy Number One! Tony Dernac, whose corpse at this moment should be stretched on a slab in the county morgue, was sitting up. The face of the figure seemed to gleam with a greenish phosphorescent light, making more horrible the vilipending leer that was directed at the horrified attorney. In the forehead of the face was a bullet hole. And the odor that was creeping into Camberton's brain was the odor of burnt gunpowder!

His round countenance paled to sickly white. His eyes almost popped out of their thick, fleshy pouches. He moved his lips but could not utter a sound.

"You!" he managed to croak at last, "you—why, damn you, Dernac, I killed you once and I'll kill you again."

He aimed his pistol at the apparition. The shanty seemed to shake as the gun roared again and again. The spurts of gunfire seemed to pierce right through the figure which rose slowly from the cot and moved relentlessly toward Camberton, step by step. The lawyer backed away from it, firing desperately. Try as he might, he could not turn and run. The eyes staring into his with a hypnotic fixedness seemed to fasten his own with invisible bands, permitting him to step back only as far as the other had stepped forward, no farther.

Sobbing wildly, Camberton pulled out his other gun and emptied its contents at the wraith. Automatically his twitching fingers jerked at the triggers of the emptied weapons, clicking them futilely.

That was the way the police squad-car crew found him, idiotically clicking the triggers of two empty guns. The shooting had aroused the neighborhood and brought the prowler car to number 692 within three minutes of the first crack of the first gun.

The lifeless body of old Fred Miller, riddled with the bullets from the attorney's pistols, lay on the cot. That was all that the police saw—that and the drooling madman who had once been Horace G. Camberton, well-known criminal attorney, pressing the revolver triggers like an automaton.

It is hardly likely that he will ever be tried for the murder of the aged shoemaker because he does not seem able to comprehend what he's done. In an asylum for the criminal insane, he crouches in his cell, insisting that he and Dernac were the only occupants of the back room at number 692.

Few people are permitted to visit the broken attorney. Fewer care to do so, since, as the authorities explain it, the mad terror which creeps over his face at intervals is of such awfulness that the most hardened observers shudder at the sight of it. The intervals are becoming more and more frequent. And, should the apparent suffering he experiences in these intervals become a permanent mental condition, it will not be necessary to punish Horace L. Camberton further for his crimes.

Away

by Barry N. Malzberg

My name is Josiah Bushnell Grinnell. In 1853, responding to the invocation of the famous Horace Greeley, publisher of the New York Tribune, I take myself to the new state of Iowa and thereupon establish both a town and a college. "Go west, young man, go west and grow with the country," Greeley has said, and solemn young fellow that I am, I take him seriously. What a surprise, what a disappointment to learn only after I am established where the tall corn grows that Greeley stole this from an obscure Indiana newspaperman named Soule and has appropriated the statement as his own. If I had known this, I might have gone to Indiana.

Instead, here I am in Iowa. What an unusually solemn man I am! I have always taken the invocations of my elders seriously, which is why the college I establish, the town to be named after me, the entire state itself takes on a somewhat sectarian whiff. A century later it is impossible for citizens to enter upon our interstates without murmuring prayers. In 1857, Sioux Indians massacre men, women, and children at Spirit Lake, the last massacre by Indians in the midwest and the released souls, the violated spirits add their pain and terror to the general chatter. On a hot May afternoon, the dead sun sprawling low in the panels of sky, the sounds of the cattle rising toward the dusk, it is possible to imagine oneself if one were a small man lying in a field, gazing, that one had entered upon the outer regions of the landscape painted by the honorable John Calvin. It is a difficult state, a difficult time.

I, Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, know this; know of all the interstices and difficulties of the sovereign state of Iowa. Cleaved from the Wisconsin territory, admitted to statehood on December 28, 1846, Iowa sprawls, flatland, on the way to the west. There are ways around it—there are ways around everything the good Lord knows—but once on the interstate, it is hard to find the way.

Here it is. It is 1954. I have been deceased for many decades, however, my spirit—no less than those massacred at Spirit Lake—lives on. Iowa is the possessor of its inhabitants, no one who has ever lived in this state has known true release. We hang around. This may seem an

unlikely statement, a remarkable condition, but wait your turn, enjoy the common passage before you act in judgment. Here in 1954 the senior senator from this great state, the honorable, if that is quite the term I am seeking, Bourke B. Hickenlooper is inveighing against the Communists at a Fourth of July picnic. Hickenlooper, with McCarthy, with Jenner, is the pride of what may be called the conservative wing. To Hickenlooper it is an insult when the first Negro set the first Negro foot on the Negro shores of the first Negro city in this country, uttering incoherent Negro chants. It is not that Hickenlooper is a racist, you understand. It is merely that he is still linked to Spirit Lake by ancestry and blood, still sees the frame of the assassin arched against the moonlight. "We must expel the Communists from our shores," Hickenlooper says. He is on a podium, at some remove from the crowd, screaming without benefit of microphone. Fourth of July picnics are still important in the Iowa of this time. Politicians are expected to make speeches, to invoke Americana. Hickenlooper is merely doing his duty. Of his true thoughts of the matter we know not. He may or may not have an interior. Most politicians do not. "McCarran Act!" Hickenlooper screams. "Joseph McCarthy! Millard Tydings! Eighty-seven hundred card-carrying Communists!" And so on. The crowd reacts stiffly. It is very hot. A band plays in the distance, raucous parade ground arias of the kind soon enough to be popularized by Meredith Willson (born in Mason City) in *The Music Man*. "Who promoted Peress?" Hickenlooper asks. The crowd mutters. Their mood is not hostile but they are tired.

My name is Josiah Bushnell Grinnell. It is hard to explain exactly what I am doing at this picnic or what I expect to come of it. We Iowans (or transplanted Iowans) as I have said, our spirits live on. Even after death. Relegated to some limbo we come in and out, reincarnates or observers, bound to some flatland of the spirit, replicating our history, moving in and out of time. Screams of the settlers at Spirit Lake. Bullshit of Greeley. Moving ever west. From this limbo I emerge at odd times, strange moments, find myself at Iowa State Events. Such seems to be the case now. I am jammed in with this crowd, listening to Bourke B. Hickenlooper. To my left and right are Iowans of various sexes and ages, most of them young, in a burst of color, standing at parade rest, listening to the rantings of the honorable senator. Now and then a baby yowls or a young woman faints, her parasol preceding her on a graceless slide to the ground. Men leap to the rescue of the women, the babies are pacified in other ways. The huge bowl of the sky presses. It is indecently hot, even for a spirit, even for the gullible sectarian spirit of a man who would listen to Horace Greeley (at least I

never knew of Horatio Alger; it is impossible to say to what state he might have sent me.) "Hickenlooper!" I shout. "Hey, Hickenlooper!"

The crowd stares at me. Sometimes I can be heard and sometimes not; sometimes I am visible and at other times invisible. Reincarnation, like life itself, is a chancy business. At this time it would appear that I can be seen. Yards down range the senator stares at me, his stride momentarily broken. "Hey, Senator!" I shout. Hickenlooper removes his enormous hat, peers at me. I stride forward, closing the ground between us.

"You're all wrong, don't you know that?" I say. "Listen to me!" I say, turning around, gesturing at the farmers, their wives, the beaus and beauxettes in their holiday undress who look at me incuriously. "This man is not telling the truth. We lived to open frontiers, he is closing them!"

I am stared at incomprehendingly. One could, after all, envision no other possibility. Politics may be entertainment but metaphysics is unendurable in the Hawkeye State. "He speaketh with forked tongue!" I point out.

There are a forest of shrugs around me. I turn back toward the podium, find Hickenlooper in brisk conference with several aides who have jumped to the sides of the platform. He cups an ear, listens intently. They gesture at me. "Answer the charge!" I yell. "Don't hide behind the others, explain yourself. Tell why you are breeding fear, why you are seeking to close off that which will be opened."

Hickenlooper points at me. The hand is commanding, enormous. At my side, suddenly, are two earnest, honest Iowa state police; they seize me by the elbows. "If you will, sir," one says, "if you'll just come along."

"Don't arrest me," I say, struggling in their grasp, "arrest that man. That man is the assassin. I am Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, the founder of Grinnell College. I am a man of substance—"

"*Card-carrying!*" I hear Hickenlooper shout and then, this is the truth, I hear no more; speedily, forcibly, forcefully, I am carried from the grounds. Beaus and beauxettes, farmers and their daughters, little towheaded children and Iowa cattle, they all look at me mournfully. The troopers are insistent. "Don't you understand?" I say to them. "This isn't the end, this is just the passage, it's going to happen again, again and *again*—"

"Stay calm, sir," one says, "everything will be all right. Just don't struggle, understand the situation—"

I close my eyes. Again and again and it is too late. In the sudden, cool rushing darkness ninety-seven years are taken from me as if by

death itself and I am at Spirit Lake once more, oh God, I am at Spirit Lake and in the sudden, clinging, rushing, tumultuous darkness, I hear the sound of the Sioux closing in around us; one high wail coming then, concentrating them, poised—

I scream then, try once more to give the alarm. But I cannot; my throat is dry, my lungs are cut out, my fate is darkness; in the night, eleven years after union, three years before the Civil War, they are coming, they are coming and the stain will leach outward, ever outward—

Go west, young man, go west—

I listened, I came. I propagated, and I could not save them. And in the face of the Hickenloopers, through to dissolution itself, I never, never will. Until by something that is, at last, beyond me, I too will be cut off.

Behind the Screen

by Dale Clark

Sight of the police officer at the corner roused Catlin from his delirious frenzy like a spray of cold water. He stopped short; he gasped, almost expelling the cigarette from his mouth. The lifting red haze of anger and dismay left him sober and shivering, and a little stunned. He stared stupidly up the dingy Chinatown street into which the first rays of the morning were stealing. He had run many blocks, perhaps miles, to reach the heart of this dismal and unsavory quarter. But why? He could not say. Somnambulistic fumes clouded his mind; he could remember only plunging on madly and blindly without having noticed either his direction or the breaking of day overhead. It was as if some invisible power had guided his flight. Aroused now, Catlin found his situation inexpressibly terrifying. And after a glance at the slit trouser leg, where the recently shaved flesh showed a bald and chalky white, he shrank into the doorway under the sign of Lung Wei.

To Catlin's surprise, the latch yielded under his fumbling hand. Inside, he stood stock-still, puffing hard at the cigarette and staring

warily about the shop. A melancholy light leaking through the small, dust-coated window quickly melted and died in the pervading murky gloom. But a faint and nebulous glow spread from an Oriental screen stretched across the rear of the long, narrow, low room. The screen was of some translucent and gauzy stuff; it had the color of silver, and shimmered with a rosy iridescence as minute ripples stirred the gossamer surface.

Behind the screen, a single candle burned with a wan and discouraged flame; its dim glimmer fell in crepuscular half-tones upon a robed figure slumbering in a cane chair. That, too, was behind the gauzy curtain.

Catlin wet his lips nervously. An uneasy sensation overpowered him: it was that he had been here before. But that, of course, could not be. His mind was playing tricks again. . . . Then he smiled harshly.

It was the odor he had recognized. There was in the shop a smell of dead incense, dry and musty and blended with the peculiar trail of opium. The musky taste in the air resembled that which he had often detected in his wife's room—she was a narcotic addict.

It was only the odor; it could be nothing more.

On tiptoe, without making a sound, he advanced into the shadows and inspected the squat show-cases and counters ranged along the low walls. He saw tiny figurines of wood and jade, vases and jars of porcelain, cabinets, sandals, and embroidered cloths. But there was nothing he could convert into money without much difficulty.

He glided toward the screen. (He had become marvelously adept in muffling his footfalls, these past few hours.)

Nevertheless, the figure in the chair behind the screen stirred, and looked around, and arose. He was Chinese, and very old. He came close to the diaphanous gauze, smiling a strange and enigmatic smile.

"Ah, here you are!" he said. "At last!"

This Lung Wei wore a black skull-cap, and had gathered about his thin shoulders a stiff, richly brocaded crimson robe. Above the robe, his thin, wrinkled, clean-shaven face had in its expression the delicacy of ancient and yellowed lace. It was, in fact, an expression too delicate, too indefinable, for analysis; it was bland, inscrutable, and mystic as well.

Staring, Catlin forgot that he had been about to hurl himself through the screen. It struck him that there was something dimly familiar in that countenance; he might have glimpsed Lung Wei in a crowd once, or it might have been only in a dream.

"Yes," he faltered, confused.

"I knew you'd come," the Oriental said. He spoke without any

accent, with the merest sibilant slurring of syllables. "You see, I have waited so patiently!"

Catlin reflected. Concealed as he stood in the shadows—and seen through the screen, too—he decided that the Chinaman had mistaken him for someone else.

"Well, here I am!" he parried gruffly. It could be no harm, this little game.

Lung Wei arched his eyebrows. "You are not afraid, young sir?" he asked softly.

Catlin puffed his cigarette. "No," he said with a laugh. "Not at all. Of course not."

"That is well." The Oriental removed his hands from the sleeves of the robe, extending them in a curious gesture of—was it appeal? Or perhaps invitation. The outspread fingers looked quite as tenuous and pale as the gossamer screen itself. "You must believe this," he said, "that I want only to help you."

Catlin did not say anything, but his heart began to beat with a furious, groping hope. Decidedly, this became interesting!

Lung Wei regarded him steadily through the shimmering curtain. "That is why I waited so long. I thought that I might be of some service to you." The delicate, unknowable smile played upon his worn and yellowed face. "Do you find that hard to understand? You—you are so very young! That was what impressed me at the first—your so-blind youth. I wonder what you thought of me. Perhaps that I was so very old, eh? Or perhaps you did not think at all?"

The musing voice dripped away into placid silence. Catlin leaned watchfully against a show-case, filling his lungs with the cigarette smoke and letting it drift from his nostrils. He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

"You do not understand, do you?" the Oriental murmured.

Catlin watched the candle brighten, watched a ripple of ruby cross the screen.

"No," he said at last.

"But that is natural." Lung Wei bobbed his head sagely. "It is confusing. One is not exactly prepared. And then, you left in such haste. You have had no time to think."

Cold perspiration cropped forth on Catlin's face at these soft, sibilant words. Some divining sixth sense warned him of an inexplicable peril.

"No!" he exclaimed roughly. "I—that is, you—both of us—why,

it's all a mistake! I'm not the man, whoever he is, you were waiting for; I came in to"—he hesitated—"to the wrong shop!"

But with his enigmatic and relentless smile, the old Chinaman said: "In that case, you had better go back. If you think I can help you when you have returned to the prison—"

With a strangled cry, Catlin started toward the screen. He raised his clenched fist.

"So you know!" he panted.

Then, and at the moment he was about to dash aside the shimmering veil, a dazzling light burst within his disordered mind; he stopped short, and the fist dropped numbly to his side.

"But then," he faltered, "if you knew—what you said about helping me—?"

He peered at the face of Lung Wei, serene and bland behind the gauze.

"It's a trick!" he said hoarsely. "A Chinese trick!"

Lung Wei laughed musically. It was not a laugh of amusement or of scorn; there was perhaps a note of pity in it.

"You do not understand, young sir," the liquid voice said.

"No," Catlin muttered.

He felt strangely dizzy. That was the sheen of the candlelight flickering on the glistening gossamer; that, and the smell of the dead incense crawling into his lungs and into his very blood.

He began to walk to and fro in front of the curtain. Presently he said slowly, "There is one solution. This man I killed—you knew him, is that it? He might have been your enemy. Let us say, he belonged to a rival Tong. That is why you offer me your help?"

He stared interrogatively at the veil. But the face of the Chinaman remained impassive, like a sheet of parchment wrinkled into indecipherable lines.

Catlin made an apologetic gesture, an opening and falling of his hands. "I do not expect you to commit yourself," he said hurriedly. "It does not matter. The thing is, I must get away. I need money. Clothes." He looked despairingly at the slit trouser leg. "I can't go far, like this."

"It is not that," Lung Wei said. "You will have to tell me exactly what happened. Otherwise—I am sorry. There would be nothing I could do."

Catlin took a long pull at the cigarette.

"I know what you mean," he muttered. "You are afraid. You needn't be. They can't trace me here. No one has seen me since I escaped. No one at all."

"We are talking at cross purposes," Lung Wei said. "If you will tell me exactly how it was—then, it may be, I can help."

"I am at your mercy," Catlin muttered. "I will try to remember. It is not very clear—there are things I can recall perfectly, and other parts of it that are quite gone."

Lung Wei made again that gesture of appeal—of sympathy, it might have been—with his hands outspread, the fingers like pale smoke, the palms dark shadows. "It is for your good, young sir."

Catlin shivered. "The worst was when the priest put the oil, the peculiar oil, over my eyes. And on my fingers. That happened, you understand, in the cell. It was because I could not stand any more! I rolled the cigarette. And when I licked it, at the same time I dropped onto my tongue the wad of cigarette papers."

He looked through the screen into the Oriental's face.

"The pellet tasted bitter. In your country, you know about that. You may have saturated paper, or a cloth with a drug? That is the way Blossom—my wife—smuggled this stuff to me."

He stood silent, thinking, watching the smoke drift upward from his lips into the dry, dead-scented air.

"I did not intend to kill that man," he said at last. "I am a respectable man, a chemist. And I could not earn money enough for her—for Blossom—to buy that stuff. That was how she met Trent, Billy Trent, met him in one of those dens where they smoke it. They put their heads together and told me how I could get it for them. It was Trent's gun I used. They waited outside in his automobile and I went in; they sent me in because the dealer would not know me. But I did not intend to kill him."

He resumed his pacing in front of the screen.

"The police were continually after me, continually asking me who had been in the car. They even promised to commute the sentence to life imprisonment if I'd tell where I got the gun. That was why Blossom brought me the cigarette papers—so at the last I wouldn't lose my nerve and confess. Being doped, you see, I could go to the chair without any fear. I swallowed the wad, the whole pellet, all that she had brought me.

"I could feel it burning in my stomach. I wasn't used to that sort of thing, and for a while I was afraid it wouldn't take hold soon enough. The warden had come in. I tried to put him off, asking for a match to light the cigarette. He didn't have one. Perhaps he saw through me. I had been sitting on the edge of the bunk; I got up and went over to the wash-stand to the candles, those candles the priest was burning.

"I remember he said something horrified. Then it happened. As I straightened up from the candles, with the first puff I became all at once sick. The dose must have been a big one. I staggered. I could feel and hear the bones in my head grinding and crunching upon themselves. When I opened my eyes, I was lying on the floor. I sat up and looked around. The priest was kneeling there in front of his candles, praying. His robe made it look like he was kneeling in a pool of black water, the robe spilled around his knees. The warden was gone."

Catlin flung back his head and laughed, filling the shop with the reverberations of his laughter.

"I suppose he had run to get the prison doctor, making sure I shouldn't cheat the chair, after all!"

He lowered his voice.

"You won't believe it," he said, "but he had left the cell door open. I crept there, on my hands and knees, so as not to disturb the priest. And the corridor was empty. I closed my eyes and opened them again to make sure.

"So I went out. I walked down the corridor, and down the stair, and so into the prison yard. You understand, all this was in the dark, before sunrise. I waited there beside the death-house wall. After a while they opened the gate to let in a car—newspaper men coming to cover the execution—and I ran out through the open gate. No one saw me."

He looked fixedly at the man behind the screen of gauze.

"It was as simple as that," he said insistently. "It was as easy as coming in here, coming into your shop."

"Of course," said Lung Wei. "Proceed."

"I went straight home," Catlin muttered. "I thought that the three of us—Blossom, and Trent, and I—could think of some safe place for me. I remember fancying how, afterward, we'd all laugh about the way that drug fooled the warden. I was quite happy about it."

The Chinaman gave him a curious glance. "Did you walk?" he asked.

Catlin became confused. "I don't know," he stammered. "I can't remember—the drug, you see—I suppose I took a street-car. It is quite a long way. I suppose that is what I did. I am perfectly sure no one noticed me, however it was."

The Oriental said, "But it is important, young sir. Can't you think?"

"I got there, anyway," Catlin told him. "I rang the bell—rang it again and again. And Blossom didn't answer. I waited there on the porch, smoking, and trying to think what to do next. And then a car—

Trent's car—stopped out in front, and those two came up onto the porch together."

His voice trembled.

"They were in evening clothes. They had been to some club or other. On the night I was to die, you see, it had been that way with them. They had been dancing and drinking. I smelled the liquor on them when I went up and spoke to her."

The eyes of the Oriental burned with a strange eagerness. "So, young sir—?"

"She did not even hear me!" Catlin declared. He avoided the gaze of Lung Wei, and continued wearily:

"They had eyes and ears only for each other. Without noticing me, they fell into each other's arms."

He began to laugh shakily. "Perhaps I should have killed them both! On the contrary, I was glad to escape. I was like an animal crawling away to lick its hurt in silence. Besides, would they have helped me? They would only have notified the police!" Then he added, almost calmly, "But, as they did not see me, there is no danger from that source."

"That is true," said Lung Wei. He appeared to reflect; his pointed yellow chin rested upon the gathered collar of the brocade robe, and his eyes were lowered.

"Your cigarette," he said at last.

"What did you say?" Catlin asked.

He stared at the screen, which had grown suddenly brighter, with a myriad of little colored glints flashing upon its shining surface. The candle in the background burned no better than before. . . . The gossamer seemed to quiver and glow with a luminous life of its own.

He looked down at the cigarette. The steady white wisp rose in a spiral from its end, from the little molten tip; and he had been smoking it for so long, for hours perhaps.

"Did I roll another?" he asked in bewilderment. "I don't remember that."

"If you will observe its odor," said the liquid Oriental voice of Lung Wei. "That is not a drug, young sir. I, who am used to such things, recognize the presence of a poison—"

"*Poison!*" cried Catlin in a dry sob. "Then she—then that is why—but *that* would mean—"

The words stumbled and blurred into a groan as Catlin reeled back from the thought. He stared blankly into that shimmering veil of gauze. And now it blazed up in pitiless molten brilliance; it extended

to titanic proportions; it became a scroll of fire. His confused eyes beheld incandescent suns wheeling in its argent depths. He cowered in a funnel of searing light. His flesh seemed to shrivel in that glare, his breath clotted in his throat, and a fierce whining, crackling sound thrashed and gibbered about his ears. The suns rushed past him, the curtain enfolded him and drew him into a weird spaceland where the myriad lights receded to pin-points. This sudden darkness was more terrible than the intolerable light had been. With a cry of despair he plunged ahead, striking madly with both fists.

Then he realized that he was fighting the little gauze screen. The gossamer was cool, like a stream of water passing over his hands. It tore with a strange tinkling sound, a patter of distant bells.

It lay in a cloud of crumpled silver at his feet. The little jeweled particles in the fabric winked in the candle-light.

Catlin raised his eyes to the face of Lung Wei.

A chill seized him; the next moment, a fever came stinging through his veins. Without the screen to veil it, the face was—

“I remember you, now,” he said. “You are the man I killed.”

The Oriental smiled his enigmatic, mystic smile.

“That is so,” replied the imperturbable yellow man. “You understand, then. Are you ready?”

“Ready?” Catlin faltered.

“To go,” said Lung Wei.

Catlin nodded. Lung Wei blew out the candle, and walked out of the shop, and the younger man followed.

There was a long moment in which Lung Wei locked the door of his establishment, and in which Catlin stood gazing into the street. The sun was well up, now, and a thin trickle of traffic stirred upon the pavement. A milk-wagon clattered over the street-car rails. A fruit peddler went by, his legs scissoring between the shafts of his cart. Away off in the city a factory whistle blew.

Catlin touched the brocaded sleeve of Lung Wei.

“Which way?” he asked.

Black Gold

by Thorp McClusky

Henry Cabot Wade stood in the small main cabin of the schooner *Marianne*, his patrician forefinger pointing out a small black cross that enigmatically marked the faded chart beneath his hands. Henry Cabot Wade's thin shoulders were stooped, for the cabin, although comfortably appointed, was low-ceiled. The last of the Wades was not as rich as his forefathers had been; as the family fortunes had shrunk so had their sailing craft.

"I think that this is the spot, Captain Manly." Wade's voice was thin, New Englandish, like the bite of frosty air.

Jeremiah Manly nodded. He spoke in a slow, twangy drawl.

"Yes. These are without doubt the two islands indicated on the chart. The strait between is the proper width, and our soundings indicate six fathoms of water."

Wade smiled bleakly.

"I suppose it is too late to begin the search today."

"Yes. The sunlight is fading. We'll remain at this anchorage for the night, and begin work around ten in the morning."

Wade's precise smile broadened.

"That glass-bottomed boat should get results in quick time. This isn't a wide channel." For a moment he squinted at the chart. "I wonder what we'll find? Black gold! What a secretive way for my revered ancestor to put it down on paper! Ten tons of black gold! And he hid this chart away in the bottom of his personal chest, so carefully. What *is* black gold?"

Both men stared down at the chart.

It *was* enigmatic—that black cross marked at the mouth of a narrow strait that ran between two small islands. But more enigmatic than the aged chart was the incoherent message written in irregular, angular letters across its face:

Here lie, six fathoms down, ten tons of black gold. And I know now that for this crime I am accursed. May God have mercy on my soul!

Captain Manly cleared his throat in embarrassment.

"You know how your ancestor Ebenezer Wade got his wealth, I assume?"

The owner's lips curled in a thin smile.

"Oh, yes, Captain," he assented, not at all apologetically. "He ran slaves. He bought them on the west coast of Africa and sold them in Savannah and New Orleans. There was money in it. We Wades, until the stock market up and busted us, always made money. Buying furs from the Indians, running loan banks, plunging in stocks—we were always exploiters, we Wades. Don't worry, Captain Manly, I know the bourgeois opinion of our family. But, as man to man it's the only way to get along."

Captain Manly did not lift his eyes from the chart.

"Perhaps," he said then, dryly. "A great many people seem to agree with you. But all this is beside the point. Mr. Wade, did you ever hear the old story that your great grandfather dumped a shipload of niggers overboard—one time a curious frigate chased him? That he never went to sea afterward?"

Wade laughed sardonically.

"No Wade would have been that soft."

Captain Manly stroked his grizzled chin. He kept his eyes focused on the chart as he replied:

"This is a narrow, shallow channel, Mr. Wade. A light vessel, if chased, would very likely put in here, where a square rigged frigate might be expected to have trouble, especially with a quartering wind. It would give a man time to unload his cargo. Nigger smell isn't real evidence, Mr. Wade."

For an instant the small cabin was still. Then Wade smiled, a trifle thinly.

"You're trying to tell me that one of my ancestors was fool enough to draw a chart showing where he'd dumped overboard a shipload of niggers?" he snapped. "You don't know the Wades."

Captain Manly's eyes lifted to the owner's finely chiseled face.

"No person can say with certainty what another human being might do," he said quietly.

Wade laughed harshly.

"We Wades *aren't* human beings—or so a great many people have said. I'll go on deck now and join Evelyn."

Slowly, as the owner stooped through the companionway, Captain Manly rolled up the chart.

"Thank heaven, Aunt Leona's gone to bed at last."

Evelyn Phelps' clear, faintly metallic voice tinkled the words. With an appreciative laugh her fiancé hunched his deck chair closer to her own and slipped his wiry right arm possessively about her shoulders. Behind their backs the foremast, a naked black finger, reared up toward the stars. The tropic breeze, balmy from the near-by Gulf Stream, fragrant with the scent of near-by land, whispered in their faces; the islands to port and starboard were low-lying, palm-fringed masses edged with gleaming white. The moon climbing over the bowsprit was bigger than an orange.

Henry Cabot Wade chuckled.

"A chaperone can be a nuisance on a night like this."

The girl sighed. "Isn't it lovely? Boston seems so far away—and money so unimportant."

For an instant, while the thought of their desiccated family fortunes swept between them, they were silent. No one knew better than they that if this search for black gold proved a failure she must marry someone else.

Restlessly, Henry Cabot Wade stirred.

"We'll get it up," he promised her, the words hard, "if we have to search every inch of this damned channel. We've brought the best diver money could buy, dynamite enough to blow up a city—"

She turned toward him and kissed his cheek, the fringe of his eyelashes, his thin, cruel lips. She admired his profile, sensitive, aquiline, somehow like that of a great predatory bird. . . .

They made love, while the moon crept from above the bowsprit to the foremast. . . .

Suddenly he stiffened, sat erect.

"Look there," he said sharply, pointing forward. Then he shook his head bewilderedly. "It's gone. Did you see it?"

She was touching her disheveled hair into place.

"See what?" she asked, her voice sleepy and warm. "I didn't see anything."

Puzzledly he muttered, "I thought I saw a—a head appear momentarily above the rail, and then vanish. It was just a—sort of dark blob. Optical illusion, I guess." He shrugged, took her, unresisting, in his arms. For long minutes they loved.

Then, abruptly, he loosed her, turned his head to peer forward. He had heard, distinctly, a soft, naked shuffling behind him!

And in that instant a strangled, high-pitched scream burst from his lips, and he was stumbling, scrambling to his feet, his face ashen, his mouth and eyes hideous with terror.

"Run, Evelyn, run!" He was flailing out with his fists in the moon light, flailing out into—emptiness!

Swiftly she rose, took one step toward him. But he motioned her back. "Run! run! Get Captain Manly—I'll hold them off as long as I can!"

She found her voice, then. "Henry Cabot Wade," she said sharply, "have you gone suddenly crazy? Or is this your idea of humor?"

He did not seem to hear. And suddenly her flesh crawled.

His right fist, lashing out frenziedly, had jolted to an abrupt stop, as though it had struck something she could not see. And slowly, step by step, he was backing, backing toward the rail.

She could see his face now, half turned toward her. And she could see that this was no play-acting, that whatever was happening was, to him at least, horribly real. And still his fists lashed out, until suddenly his left arm lashed out no more, but remained close to his side, tugging, struggling weirdly, as though pinioned to his body by invisible hands.

And through his screams came nightmarish words:

"Run, Evelyn, run! For God's sake, get help! They're swarming over the rail; they're too many for me. Big black niggers, in rusty chains—ahh!"

The words ended in a bubbling moan. His right hand clawed frantically at his throat.

Like a puppet dangling at the end of invisible strings, he rose up and over the rail, *backward*, and vanished from sight. There was a hollow splash. . . .

Evelyn heard her own voice, babbling incoherently. Intermittent, chill waves of terror swept over her, waves of terror and of horror. For she knew that no man could have leaped like that—over the rail. And the deck was moon-bathed, serene in its utter desertedness. . . .



Captain Jeremiah Manly stood at the *Marianne's* rail, ear-phones clamped to his head, looking down into the gray, gently heaving channel. His face, in the early dawn, was pale, and there was an odd quaver in his voice as he talked, in low tones, with the diver thirty feet below.

Except for the rhythmic soughing of the pump and the murmur of

his own words there was no sound on the *Marianne's* deck. Evelyn Phelps was below, asleep; her aunt had given her morphine. The three members of the crew who were on deck did not speak.

The diver's mechanical speech came through the ear-phones.

"All right. Haul away. Then bring me up. I'm gettin' the jitters."

Half a minute later Henry Cabot Wade's body, the end of a half-inch rope knotted beneath the armpits, came over the rail. The sailors put the dripping corpse down gingerly on the deck and covered it with a tarpaulin.

The diver came up next, bulbous and cumbersome in his heavy suit and helmet. While the sailors stripped him of his helmet Captain Manly took the ear phones from his own head and put them down with a sigh of relief. The sougling of the pump had ceased.

The diver climbed out of his suit, left it lying in a dripping heap on the deck. He looked at Captain Manly, and Captain Manly saw that the pupils of his eyes were enormous. Suddenly he began to tremble. He was afraid, now that he was safe on deck.

When he spoke, his voice was a croak.

"They were down there, dozens of them—skeletons picked clean by barracuda and shark—all linked together by one endless chain with half a ton of ballast on the end."

Captain Manly's lips moved. But no distinguishable words came forth. The diver sat down weakly beside the pump. He did not look toward the tarpaulin-shrouded form.

"Wade was tangled up in them—there were twenty or more of them piled *on top of him!* They broke all apart when I touched them.

"And one of them, right on the bottom of the pile, had him by the throat. I had to pick the fingerbones out of his neck. And the strangler wore this—this thing."

He extended a peculiar-looking ornament toward Captain Manly. Both men stared silently at the object.

It was a necklace of enormous *teeth*, curiously carved, and bound together by a thin golden wire.

Captain Manly cleared his throat. His mouth felt oddly dry.

"God!" he said, then, slowly. "He must've been a witch-doctor, a *shaman*. I've read about such things in the National Geographic Magazine. He must've put a curse on the Wades."

Bone to his Bone

by E. G. Swain

William Whitehead, Fellow of Emmanuel College, in the University of Cambridge, became Vicar of Stoneground in the year 1731. The annals of his incumbency were doubtless short and simple: they have not survived. In his day were no newspapers to collect gossip, no Parish Magazines to record the simple events of parochial life. One event, however, of greater moment then than now, is recorded in two places. Vicar Whitehead failed in health after 23 years of work, and journeyed to Bath in what his monument calls 'the vain hope of being restored'. The duration of his visit is unknown; it is reasonable to suppose that he made his journey in the summer, it is certain that by the month of November his physician told him to lay aside all hope of recovery.

Then it was that the thoughts of the patient turned to the comfortable straggling vicarage he had left at Stoneground, in which he had hoped to end his days. He prayed that his successor might be as happy there as he had been himself. Setting his affairs in order, as became one who had but a short time to live, he executed a will, bequeathing to the Vicars of Stoneground, for ever, the close of ground he had recently purchased because it lay next the vicarage garden. And by a codicil, he added to the bequest his library of books. Within a few days, William Whitehead was gathered to his fathers.

A mural tablet in the north aisle of the church, records, in Latin, his services and his bequests, his two marriages, and his fruitless journey to Bath. The house he loved, but never again saw, was taken down 40 years later, and re-built by Vicar James Devic. The garden, with Vicar Whitehead's 'close of ground' and other adjacent lands, was opened out and planted, somewhat before 1850, by Vicar Robert Towerson. The aspect of everything has changed. But in a convenient chamber on the first floor of the present vicarage the library of Vicar Whitehead stands very much as he used it and loved it, and as he bequeathed it to his successors 'for ever'.

The books there are arranged as he arranged and ticketed them. Little slips of paper, sometimes bearing interesting fragments of writing, still mark his places. His marginal comments still give life to pages from which all other interest has faded, and he would have but a dull

imagination who could sit in the chamber amidst these books without ever being carried back 180 years into the past, to the time when the newest of them left the printer's hands.

Of those into whose possession the books have come, some have doubtless loved them more, and some less; some, perhaps, have left them severely alone. But neither those who loved them, nor those who loved them not, have lost them, and they passed, some century and a half after William Whitehead's death, into the hands of Mr Batchel, who loved them as a father loves his children. He lived alone, and had few domestic cares to distract his mind. He was able, therefore, to enjoy to the full what Vicar Whitehead had enjoyed so long before him. During many a long summer evening would he sit poring over long-forgotten books; and since the chamber, otherwise called the library, faced the south, he could also spend sunny winter mornings there without discomfort. Writing at a small table, or reading as he stood at a tall desk, he would browse amongst the books like an ox in a pleasant pasture.

There were other times also, at which Mr Batchel would use the books. Not being a sound sleeper (for book-loving men seldom are), he elected to use as a bedroom one of the two chambers which opened at either side into the library. The arrangement enabled him to beguile many a sleepless hour amongst the books, and in view of these nocturnal visits he kept a candle standing in a sconce above the desk, and matches always ready to his hand.

There was one disadvantage in this close proximity of his bed to the library. Owing, apparently, to some defect in the fittings of the room, which, having no mechanical tastes, Mr Batchel had never investigated, there could be heard, in the stillness of the night, exactly such sounds as might arise from a person moving about amongst the books. Visitors using the other adjacent room would often remark at breakfast, that they had heard their host in the library at one or two o'clock in the morning, when, in fact, he had not left his bed. Invariably Mr Batchel allowed them to suppose that he had been where they thought him. He disliked idle controversy, and was unwilling to afford an opening for supernatural talk. Knowing well enough the sounds by which his guests had been deceived, he wanted no other explanation of them than his own, though it was of too vague a character to count as an explanation. He conjectured that the window-sashes, or the doors, or 'something', were defective, and was too phlegmatic and too unpractical to make any investigation. The matter gave him no concern.

Persons whose sleep is uncertain are apt to have their worst nights when they would like their best. The consciousness of a special need

for rest seems to bring enough mental disturbance to forbid it. So on Christmas Eve, in the year 1907, Mr Batchel, who would have liked to sleep well, in view of the labours of Christmas Day, lay hopelessly wide awake. He exhausted all the known devices for courting sleep, and, at the end, found himself wider awake than ever. A brilliant moon shone into his room, for he hated window-blinds. There was a light wind blowing, and the sounds in the library were more than usually suggestive of a person moving about. He almost determined to have the sashes 'seen to', although he could seldom be induced to have anything 'seen to'. He disliked changes, even for the better, and would submit to great inconvenience rather than have things altered with which he had become familiar.

As he revolved these matters in his mind, he heard the clocks strike the hour of midnight, and having now lost all hope of falling asleep, he rose from his bed, got into a large dressing gown which hung in readiness for such occasions, and passed into the library, with the intention of reading himself sleepy, if he could.

The moon, by this time, had passed out of the south, and the library seemed all the darker by contrast with the moonlit chamber he had left. He could see nothing but two blue-grey rectangles formed by the windows against the sky, the furniture of the room being altogether invisible. Groping along to where the table stood, Mr Batchel felt over its surface for the matches which usually lay there; he found, however, that the table was cleared of everything. He raised his right hand, therefore, in order to feel his way to a shelf where the matches were sometimes mislaid, and at that moment, whilst his hand was in mid-air, the matchbox was gently put into it!

Such an incident could hardly fail to disturb even a phlegmatic person, and Mr Batchel cried 'Who's this?' somewhat nervously. There was no answer. He struck a match, looked hastily round the room, and found it empty, as usual. There was everything, that is to say, that he was accustomed to see, but no other person than himself.

It is not quite accurate, however, to say that everything was in its usual state. Upon the tall desk lay a quarto volume that he had certainly not placed there. It was his quite invariable practice to replace his books upon the shelves after using them, and what we may call his library habits were precise and methodical. A book out of place like this, was not only an offence against good order, but a sign that his privacy had been intruded upon. With some surprise, therefore, he lit the candle standing ready in the sconce, and proceeded to examine the book, not sorry, in the disturbed condition in which he was, to have an occupation found for him.

The book proved to be one with which he was unfamiliar, and this made it certain that some other hand than his had removed it from its place. Its title was 'The Compleat Gard'ner' of M. de la Quintinye made English by John Evelyn Esquire. It was not a work in which Mr Batchel felt any great interest. It consisted of divers reflections on various parts of husbandry, doubtless entertaining enough, but too deliberate and discursive for practical purposes. He had certainly never used the book, and growing restless now in mind, said to himself that some boy having the freedom of the house, had taken it down from its place in the hope of finding pictures.

But even whilst he made this explanation he felt its weakness. To begin with, the desk was too high for a boy. The improbability that any boy would place a book there was equalled by the improbability that he would leave it there. To discover its uninviting character would be the work only of a moment, and no boy would have brought it so far from its shelf.

Mr Batchel had, however, come to read, and habit was too strong with him to be wholly set aside. Leaving 'The Compleat Gard'ner' on the desk, he turned round to the shelves to find some more congenial reading.

Hardly had he done this when he was startled by a sharp rap upon the desk behind him, followed by a rustling of paper. He turned quickly about and saw the quarto lying open. In obedience to the instinct of the moment, he at once sought a natural cause for what he saw. Only a wind, and that of the strongest, could have opened the book, and laid back its heavy cover; and though he accepted, for a brief moment, that explanation, he was too candid to retain it longer. The wind out of doors was very light. The window sash was closed and latched, and, to decide the matter finally, the book had its back, and not its edges, turned towards the only quarter from which a wind could strike.

Mr Batchel approached the desk again and stood over the book. With increasing perturbation of mind (for he still thought of the matchbox) he looked upon the open page. Without much reason beyond that he felt constrained to do something, he read the words of the half completed sentence at the turn of the page—

'at dead of night he left the house and passed into the solitude of the garden.'

But he read no more, nor did he give himself the trouble of discovering whose midnight wandering was being described, although the habit was singularly like one of his own. He was in no condition for

reading, and turning his back upon the volume he slowly paced the length of the chamber, 'wondering at that which had come to pass.'

He reached the opposite end of the chamber and was in the act of turning, when again he heard the rustling of paper, and by the time he had faced round, saw the leaves of the book again turning over. In a moment the volume lay at rest, open in another place, and there was no further movement as he approached it. To make sure that he had not been deceived, he read again the words as they entered the page. The author was following a not uncommon practice of the time, and throwing common speech into forms suggested by Holy Writ: 'So dig,' it said, 'that ye may obtain.'

This passage, which to Mr Batchel seemed reprehensible in its levity, excited at once his interest and his disapproval. He was prepared to read more, but this time was not allowed. Before his eye could pass beyond the passage already cited, the leaves of the book slowly turned again, and presented but a termination of five words and a colophon.

The words were, 'to the North, an Ilex.' These three passages, in which he saw no meaning and no connection, began to entangle themselves together in Mr Batchel's mind. He found himself repeating them in different orders, now beginning with one, and now with another. Any further attempt at reading he felt to be impossible, and he was in no mind for any more experiences of the unaccountable. Sleep was, of course, further from him than ever, if that were conceivable. What he did, therefore, was to blow out the candle, to return to his moonlit bedroom, and put on more clothing, and then to pass downstairs with the object of going out of doors.

It was not unusual with Mr Batchel to walk about his garden at nighttime. This form of exercise had often, after a wakeful hour, sent him back to his bed refreshed and ready for sleep. The convenient access to the garden at such times lay through his study, whose French windows opened on to a short flight of steps, and upon these he now paused for a moment to admire the snow-like appearance of the lawns, bathed as they were in the moonlight. As he paused, he heard the city clocks strike the half-hour after midnight, and he could not forbear repeating aloud

'At dead of night he left the house, and passed into the solitude of the garden.'

It was solitary enough. At intervals the screech of an owl, and now and then the noise of a train, seemed to emphasise the solitude by drawing attention to it and then leaving it in possession of the night. Mr Batchel found himself wondering and conjecturing what Vicar White-

head, who had acquired the close of land to secure quiet and privacy for a garden, would have thought of the railways to the west and north. He turned his face northwards, whence a whistle had just sounded, and saw a tree beautifully outlined against the sky. His breath caught at the sight. Not because the tree was unfamiliar. Mr Batchel knew all his trees. But what he had seen was 'to the north, an Ilex.'

Mr Batchel knew not what to make of it all. He had walked into the garden hundreds of times and as often seen the Ilex, but the words out of 'The Compleat Gard'ner' seemed to be pursuing him in a way that made him almost afraid. His temperament, however, as has been said already, was phlegmatic. It was commonly said, and Mr Batchel approved the verdict, whilst he condemned its inexactness, that 'his nerves were made of fiddle-string', so he braced himself afresh and set upon his walk round the silent garden, which he was accustomed to begin in a northerly direction, and was now too proud to change. He usually passed the Ilex at the beginning of his perambulation, and so would pass it now.

He did not pass it. A small discovery, as he reached it, annoyed and disturbed him. His gardener, as careful and punctilious as himself, never failed to house all his tools at the end of a day's work. Yet there, under the Ilex, standing upright in moonlight brilliant enough to cast a shadow of it, was a spade.

Mr Batchel's second thought was one of relief. After his extraordinary experiences in the library (he hardly knew now whether they had been real or not) something quite commonplace would act sedatively, and he determined to carry the spade to the tool-house.

The soil was quite dry, and the surface even a little frozen, so Mr Batchel left the path, walked up to the spade, and would have drawn it towards him. But it was as if he had made the attempt upon the trunk of the Ilex itself. The spade would not be moved. Then, first with one hand, and then with both, he tried to raise it, and still it stood firm. Mr Batchel, of course, attributed this to the frost, slight as it was. Wondering at the spade's being there, and annoyed at its being frozen, he was about to leave it and continue his walk, when the remaining words of 'The Compleat Gard'ner' seemed rather to utter themselves, than to await his will—

'So dig, that ye may obtain.'

Mr Batchel's power of independent action now deserted him. He took the spade, which no longer resisted, and began to dig. 'Five spadefuls and no more,' he said aloud. 'This is all foolishness.'

Four spadefuls of earth he then raised and spread out before him in the moonlight. There was nothing unusual to be seen. Nor did Mr Batchel decide what he would look for, whether coins, jewels, documents in canisters, or weapons. In point of fact, he dug against what he deemed his better judgement, and expected nothing. He spread before him the fifth and last spadeful of earth, not quite without result, but with no result that was at all sensational. The earth contained a bone. Mr Batchel's knowledge of anatomy was sufficient to show him that it was a human bone. He identified it, even by moonlight, as the *radius*, a bone of the forearm, as he removed the earth from it, with his thumb.

Such a discovery might be thought worthy of more than the very ordinary interest Mr Batchel showed. As a matter of fact, the presence of a human bone was easily to be accounted for. Recent excavations within the church had caused the upturning of numberless bones, which had been collected and reverently buried. But an earth-stained bone is also easily overlooked, and this *radius* had obviously found its way into the garden with some of the earth brought out of the church.

Mr Batchel was glad, rather than regretful at this termination to his adventure. He was once more provided with something to do. The reinterment of such bones as this had been his constant care, and he decided at once to restore the bone to consecrated earth. The time seemed opportune. The eyes of the curious were closed in sleep, he himself was still alert and wakeful. The spade remained by his side and the bone in his hand. So he betook himself, there and then, to the churchyard. By the still generous light of the moon, he found a place where the earth yielded to his spade, and within a few minutes the bone was laid decently to earth, some 18 inches deep.

The city clocks struck one as he finished. The whole world seemed asleep, and Mr Batchel slowly returned to the garden with his spade. As he hung it in its accustomed place he felt stealing over him the welcome desire to sleep. He walked quietly on to the house and ascended to his room. It was now dark: the moon had passed on and left the room in shadow. He lit a candle, and before undressing passed into the library. He had an irresistible curiosity to see the passages in John Evelyn's book which had so strangely adapted themselves to the events of the past hour.

In the library a last surprise awaited him. The desk upon which the book had lain was empty. 'The Compleat Gard'ner' stood in its place on the shelf. And then Mr Batchel knew that he had handled a bone of William Whitehead, and that in response to his own entreaty.

The Burned House

by Vincent O'Sullivan

One night at the end of dinner, the last time I crossed the Atlantic, somebody in our group remarked that we were just passing over the spot where the *Lusitania* had gone down. Whether this were the case or not, the thought of it was enough to make us rather grave, and we dropped into some more or less serious discussion about the emotions of men and women who see all hope gone, and realise that they are going to sink with the vessel.

From that the talk wandered to the fate of the drowned. Was not theirs, after all, a fortunate end? Somebody related details from the narratives of those who had been all-but drowned in the accident of the war. A Scotch lady inquired fancifully if the ghosts of those who are lost at sea ever appear above the waters and come aboard ships. Would there be danger of seeing one when the light was turned out in her cabin? This put an end to all seriousness, and most of us laughed. But a little, tight-faced man, bleak and iron-grey, who had been listening attentively, did not laugh. The lady noticed his decorum, and appealed to him for support.

"You are like me—you believe in ghosts!" she asked lightly.

He hesitated, thinking it over.

"In ghosts?" he repeated slowly. "N-no, I don't know as I do. I've never had any personal experience that way. I've never seen the ghost of anyone I knew. Has anybody here?"

No one replied. Instead, most of us laughed again—a little uneasily, perhaps.

"All the same, strange enough things happen in life," resumed the man, "even if you leave out ghosts, that you can't clear up by laughing. You laugh till you've had some experience big enough to shock you, and then you don't laugh any more. It's like being thrown out of a car—"

At this moment there was a blast on the whistle, and everybody rushed up on deck. As it turned out, we had only entered into a belt of fog. On the upper deck I fell in again with the little man, smoking a cigar and walking up and down. We took a few turns together, and he

referred to the conversation at dinner. Our laughter evidently rankled in his mind.

"So many strange things happen in life that you can't account for," he protested. "You go on laughing at faith-healing, and at dreams, and this and that, and then something comes along that you just can't explain. You have got to throw up your hands and allow that it doesn't answer to any tests our experience has provided us with. Now, I'm as matter-of-fact a man as any of those folks down there; but once I had an experience which I had to conclude was out of the ordinary. Whether other people believe it or not, or whether they think they can explain it, don't matter. It happened to me, and I could no more doubt it than I could doubt having had a tooth pulled after the dentist had done it. If you will sit down here with me in this corner, out of the wind, I'll tell you how it was.

"Some years ago I had to be for several months in the North of England. I was before the courts; it does not signify now what for, and it is all forgotten by this time. But it was a long and worrying case, and it aged me by twenty years. Well, sir, all through the trial, in that grimy Manchester court-room, I kept thinking and thinking of a fresh little place I knew in the Lake district, and I helped to get through the hours by thinking that if things went well with me I'd go there at once. And so it was that on the very next morning after I was acquitted I boarded the north-bound train.

"It was the early autumn; the days were closing in, and it was night and cold when I arrived. The village was very dark and deserted; they don't go out much after dark in those parts, anyhow, and the keen mountain wind was enough to quell any lingering desire. The hotel was not one of those modern places which are equipped and upholstered like the great city hotels. It was one of the real old-fashioned taverns, about as uncomfortable places as there are on earth, where the idea is to show the traveller that travelling is a penitential state, and that, morally and physically, the best place for him is home. The landlord brought me a kind of supper, with his hat on and a pipe in his mouth. The room was chilly, but when I asked for a fire, he said he guessed he couldn't go out to the woodshed till morning. There was nothing else to do, when I had eaten my supper, but to go outside, both to get the smell of the lamp out of my nose and to warm myself by a short walk.

"As I did not know the country well, I did not mean to go far. But although it was an overcast night, with a high north-east wind and an occasional flurry of rain, the moon was up, and, even concealed by clouds as it was, it yet lit the night with a kind of twilight grey—not

vivid, like the open moonlight, but good enough to see some distance. On account of this, I prolonged my stroll, and kept walking on and on till I was a considerable way from the village, and in a region as lonely as anywhere in the country. Great trees and shrubs bordered the road, and many feet below was a mountain stream. What with the passion of the wind pouring through the high trees and the shout of the water racing among the boulders, it seemed to me sometimes like the noise of a crowd of people. Sometimes the branches of the trees became so thick that I was walking as if in a black pit, unable to see my hand close to my face. Then, coming out from the tunnel of branches, I would step once more into a grey clearness which opened the road and surrounding country a good way on all sides.

"I suppose it might be some three-quarters of an hour I had been walking when I came to a fork of the road. One branch ran downward, getting almost on a level with the bed of the torrent; the other mounted in a steep hill, and this, after a little idle debating, I decided to follow. After I had climbed for more than half a mile, thinking that if I should happen to lose track of one of the landmarks I should be very badly lost, the path—for it was now no more than that—curved, and I came out on a broad plateau. There, to my astonishment, I saw a house. It was a good-sized house, three storeys high, with a verandah round two sides of it, and from the elevation on which it stood it commanded a far stretch of country.

"There were a few great trees at a little distance from the house, and behind it, a stone's-throw away, was a clump of bushes. Still, it looked lonely and stark, offering its four sides unprotected to the winds. For all that, I was very glad to see it. 'It does not matter now,' I thought, 'whether I have lost my way or not. The people in the house will set me right.'

"But when I came up to it I found that it was, to all appearance, uninhabited. The shutters were closed on all the windows; there was not a spark of light anywhere. There was something about it, something sinister and barren, that gave me the kind of shiver you have at the door of a room where you know that a dead man lies inside, or if you get thinking hard about dropping over the rail into that black waste of waters out there. This feeling, you know, isn't altogether unpleasant; you relish all the better your present security. It was the same with me standing before that house. I was not *really* frightened. I was alone up there, miles from any kind of help, at the mercy of whoever might be lurking behind the shutters of that sullen house; but I felt that by all the chances I was perfectly alone and safe. My sensation of the uncanny was due to the effect on the nerves produced by wild

scenery and the unexpected sight of a house in such a very lonely situation. Thus I reasoned, and, instead of following the road farther, I walked over the grass till I came to a stone wall, perhaps two hundred and fifty yards in front of the house, and rested my arms on it, looking forth at the scene.

"On the crests of the hills far away a strange light lingered, like the first touch of dawn in the sky on a rainy morning or the last glimpse of twilight before night comes. Between me and the hills was a wide stretch of open country. On my right hand was an apple orchard, and I observed that a stile had been made in the wall of piled stones to enable the house people to go back and forth.

"Now, after I had been there leaning on the wall some considerable time, I saw a man coming towards me through the orchard. He was walking with a good, free stride, and as he drew nearer I could see that he was a tall, sinewy fellow between twenty-five and thirty, with a shaven face, wearing a slouch hat, a dark woollen shirt, and gaiters. When he reached the stile and began climbing over it I bade him goodnight in neighbourly fashion. He made no reply, but he looked me straight in the face, and the look gave me a qualm. Not that it was an evil face, mind you—it was a handsome, serious face—but it was ravaged by some terrible passion: stealth was on it, ruthlessness, and a deadly resolution, and at the same time such a look as a man driven by some uncontrollable power might throw on surrounding things, asking for comprehension and mercy. It was impossible for me to resent his churlishness, his thoughts were so certainly elsewhere. I doubt if he even saw me.

"He could not have gone by more than a quarter of a minute when I turned to look after him. He had disappeared. The plateau lay bare before me, and it seemed impossible that, even if he had sprinted like an athlete, he could have got inside the house in so little time. But I have always made it a rule to attribute what I cannot understand to natural causes that I have failed to observe. I said to myself that no doubt the man had gone back into the orchard by some other opening in the wall lower down, or there might be some flaw in my vision owing to the uncertain and distorting light.

"But even as I continued to look towards the house, leaning my back now against the wall, I noticed that there were lights springing up in the windows behind the shutters. They were flickering lights, now bright—now dim, and had a ruddy glow like firelight. Before I had looked long I became convinced that it was indeed firelight—the house was on fire. Black smoke began to pour from the roof; the red sparks flew in the wind. Then at a window above the roof of the

verandah the shutters were thrown open, and I heard a woman shriek. I ran towards the house as hard as I could, and when I drew near I could see her plainly.

"She was a young woman; her hair fell in disorder over her white nightgown. She stretched out her bare arms, screaming. I saw a man come behind and seize her. But they were caught in a trap. The flames were licking round the windows, and the smoke was killing them. Even now the part of the house where they stood was caving in.

"Appalled by this horrible tragedy which had thus suddenly risen before me, I made my way still nearer the house, thinking that if the two could struggle to the side of the house not bounded by the verandah they might jump, and I might break the fall. I was shouting this at them; I was right up close to the fire; and then I was struck by—I noticed for the first time an astonishing thing—the flames had no heat in them!

"I was standing near enough to the fire to be singed by it, and yet I felt no heat. The sparks were flying about my head; some fell on my hands, and they did not burn. And now I perceived that, although the smoke was rolling in columns, I was not choked by the smoke, and that there had been no smell of smoke since the fire broke out. Neither was there any glare against the sky.

"As I stood there stupefied, wondering how these things could be, the whole house was swept by a very tornado of flame, and crashed down in a red ruin.

"Stricken to the heart by this abominable catastrophe, I made my way uncertainly down the hill, shouting for help. As I came to a little wooden bridge spanning the torrent, just beyond where the roads forked, I saw what appeared to be a rope in loose coils lying there. I saw that part of it was fastened to the railing of the bridge and hung outside, and I looked over. There was a man's body swinging by the neck between the road and the stream. I leaned over still farther, and then I recognised him as the man I had seen coming out of the orchard. His hat had fallen off, and the toes of his boots just touched the water.

"It seemed hardly possible, and yet it was certain. That was the man, and he was hanging there. I scrambled down at the side of the bridge, and put out my hand to seize the body, so that I might lift it up and relieve the weight on the rope. I succeeded in clutching hold of his loose shirt, and for a second I thought that it had come away in my hand. Then I found that my hand had closed on nothing, I had clutched nothing but air. And yet the figure swung by the neck before my eyes!

"I was suffocated with such horror that I feared for a moment I must lose consciousness. The next minute I was running and stumbling along that dark road in mortal anxiety, my one idea being to rouse the town, and bring men to the bridge. That, I say, was my intention; but the fact is that when I came at last in sight of the village I slowed down instinctively and began to reflect. After all, I was unknown there; I had just gone through a disagreeable trial in Manchester, and rural people were notoriously given to groundless suspicion. I had had enough of the law, and of arrests without sufficient evidence. The wisest thing would be to drop a hint or two before the landlord, and judge by his demeanour whether to proceed.

"I found him sitting where I had left him, smoking, in his shirt-sleeves, with his hat on.

" 'Well,' he said slowly, 'I didn't know where you had got to.'

"I told him I had been taking a walk. I went on to mention casually the fork in the road, the hill, and the plateau.

" 'And who lives in that house?' I asked with a good show of indifference, 'on top of the hill?'

"He stared.

" 'House? There ain't no house up there,' he said positively. 'Old Joe Snedeker, who owns the land, says he's going to build a house up there for his son to live in when he gets married; but he ain't begun yet, and some folks reckon he never will.'

" 'I feel sure I *saw* a house,' I protested feebly. But I was thinking—no heat in the fire, no substance in the body. I had not the courage to dispute.

"The landlord looked at me not unkindly. 'You seem sort of done up,' he remarked. 'What you want is to go to bed.' "

The man who was telling me the story paused, and for a moment we sat silent, listening to the pant of the machinery, the thrumming of the wind in the wire stays, and the lash of the sea. Some voices were singing on the deck below. I considered him with the shade of contemptuous superiority we feel, as a rule, towards those who tell us their dreams or what some fortune-teller has predicted.

"Hallucinations," I said at last, with reassuring indulgence. "Trick of the vision, toxic ophthalmia. After the long strain of your trial your nerves were shattered."

"That's what I thought myself," he replied shortly, "especially after I had been out to the plateau the next morning, and saw no sign that a house had ever stood there."

"And no corpse at the bridge?" I said; and laughed.

"And no corpse at the bridge."

He tried to get a light for another cigar. This took him some little time, and when at last he managed it, he got out of his chair and stood looking down at me.

"Now listen. I told you that the thing happened several years ago. I'd got almost to forget it; if you can only persuade yourself that a thing is a freak of imagination, it pretty soon gets dim inside your head. Delusions have no staying power once it is realised that they are delusions. Whenever it did come back to me, I used to think how near I had once been to going out of my mind. That was all.

"Well, last year, being up north, I went up to that village again. I went to the same hotel, and found the same landlord. He remembered me at once as 'the feller who stayed with him and thought he saw a house,' 'I believe you had the jim-jams,' he said.

"We laughed, and the landlord went on:

" 'There's been a house there since, though.'

" 'Has there?'

" 'Yes; an' it ha' been as well if there never had been. Old Snedcker built it for his son, a fine big house with a verandah on two sides. The son, young Joe, got courting Mabel Elting from Windermere. She'd gone down to work in a shop somewhere in Liverpool. Well, sir, she used to get carrying on with another young feller 'bout here, Jim Travers, and Jim was wild about her; used to save up his wages to go down to see her. But she chucked him in the end, and married Joe; I suppose because Joe had the house, and the old man's money to expect. Well, poor Jim must ha' gone quite mad. What do you think he did? The very first night the new-wed pair spent in that house he burned it down. Burned the two of them in their bed, and he was as nice and quiet a feller as you want to see. He may ha' been full of whisky at the time.'

" 'No, he wasn't,' I said.

" 'The landlord looked surprised.

" 'You've heard about it?'

" 'No; go on.'

" 'Yes, sir, he burned them in their bed. And then what do you think he did? He hung himself at the little bridge half a mile below. Do you remember where the road divides? Well, it was there. I saw his body hanging there myself the next morning. The toes of his boots were just touching the water.' "

Clocks

by Darrell Schweitzer

He returned to the house again on an evening in November. He had been away a year, but nothing had changed. The house stood pale and dark among the trees as the twilight deepened, as the walls, trees, ground and sky all faded into that particular autumn grey which is almost blue. He stood in the cold, listening to the rain hiss faintly on the fallen leaves, wishing he could stand there forever, that time would cease its motion and this moment would never pass.

But, inevitably, as he did every year, he made his way along the leaf-covered path to the front porch. Again he stood procrastinating, fumbling with his keys until his fingers, by themselves, found the key he needed and his hand had turned it in the lock before he was even aware. Then he stepped into the dark house, the door sweeping aside a year's worth of junk mail he had never been able to cancel.

Behind him, the rain whispered, and when he closed the door there was another sound, a faint ticking. He stooped to gather the junk mail into a basket, and noticed the clock on the mail stand, a few inches from his face. It was a cheap, plastic thing, decorated with figures of shepherd girls, like characters out of *Heidi*.

It was one of his wife's clocks. As long as her clocks were here, she was too, in a way. All her life, Edith had collected clocks.

He wound it, and it seemed to tick louder. Then he stood up and wound a row of little golden alarm clocks that stood along the top of a bookcase to his left. They had stopped, and now they added to the faint, rhythmical ticking. He didn't set the time on any of them. That wasn't the point.

It was only after he had completed this task that he turned on the lights, surveyed the hallway, and stepped to his right, into the living room. The ticking followed him, until it was lost in the deeper sound of the grandfather clock that waited in the shadows by the fireplace. He remembered how they had found that grandfather clock in an antique shop once, long, long ago, how Edith had raved over it, begging him to buy it in her joking-but-earnest way, until he relented (even though they *couldn't* afford it). There had been weekends spent polishing, repairing, finishing. In the end, when they were ready, when

the thing stood dark and gleaming in the living room, it had been like a birth. Or that was how he remembered it now.

He flicked on one small light, and saw in the semi-darkness another clock humped on the mantelpiece. There was a story about that one, too, and as he wound the clock, once more the memory came to him.

Then he sat down by the empty fireplace, exhausted and sad. He put his feet up on a little stool and stared into the fireplace for a while, listening to the clocks. The house was stirring, the soft tick-tick-ticking like the breathing of a great beast turning in its sleep.

He dozed off, and when he awoke it was dark outside. He heard sounds from the kitchen, dishes touching gently, a cabinet door closing, but he remained where he was, listening to those sounds and to the clocks. The grandfather clock chimed softly.

A few minutes later he did get up, his joints aching. He realized that he was still wearing his hat and coat. He left them on the chair and walked through a narrow hall, past the dark basement stairway, into the kitchen.

There was a steaming cup of tea on the counter by the sink, and two slices of warm toast on a plate, both buttered, one with jam, one without, the way she had always fixed them for him when he worked late at night. He turned and stretched to wind the clock on top of the spice cabinet. It was a smiling metal Buddha with the clock face in its belly, a ridiculous thing (again, full of memories), but she had put it there once, long, long ago, and there it remained, gazing down at him serenely as he ate his toast and drank his tea.

He was almost crying then, but he held back his tears as he went from room to room, winding clocks, until their sound was like that of a million tiny birds outside the windows, gently, very patiently pecking to get in.

Upstairs, a door closed.

In the library he found a brush with long, blonde hairs in it, discarded on a desktop.

He used a key to wind an intricately carved wooden castle of a clock, where armored knights appeared on the battlements at the ringing of every hour.

The ticking was still gentle, but more insistent, unyielding, like the sound of surf on a quiet night.

When he had made a circuit of the first floor, he came to the front door again, but turned away from it and slowly climbed the front stairs. He was sobbing by then. The sounds from behind him seemed to rise, to propel him up the stairs.

He found his wife's furry slippers at the top, neatly together by the

bathroom door where she often left them. He wept, and leaned his head against the wall, pounding softly with his fist.

More than anything else, he wanted just to leave, but then he heard the singing from behind the bedroom door, and he knew that, of course, he could not go away. The song was one he had taught Edith before they were married, long, long ago.

He entered the bedroom and she was there, and she was young and beautiful. She helped him undress and pulled him into the bed, whispering softly as she did, then silent, and for a while he was completely happy, suspended in a single moment of time.

A clock ticked on the nightstand.

When he awoke it was morning and she was gone. The empty-half of the bed was cold, the covers thrown back. He wept again, bitterly, deeply, cursing himself for having continued the cruel, miraculous farce, for torturing himself one more time, for doing this, somehow, to her, once again. He held up his hands before his face, and he saw how wrinkled the backs of them were, how age-spotted. He touched the top of his head, running his fingers through his thinning hair.

She had still been twenty-six and beautiful. She would always be twenty-six and beautiful.

And the memories came flooding back with horrible vividness, until he was living them again: the rainy night, the screeching tires, the car on its side by the road's edge, Edith in his arms while one set of headlights after another flared by and nobody stopped for what seemed like hours.

He turned over in the bed and pressed his face into the pillow, crying like a small child, and hoping, absurdly, that he would eventually run out of tears.

He tried to tell himself that he wouldn't come again next year, that this would finally cease, but he knew better. When he got up to dress and found a note stuck onto the telephone by the bed, it was only a confirmation.

The note said: I LOVE YOU. —EDITH.

He was still crying, but softly, as he went down the front stairs, around and into the kitchen, and from there down the dark, creaking stairway into the basement. At the bottom he stood once more, wishing he could stand there motionless forever, that he didn't have to go forward, but, again, he knew better. He flicked on the lights, revealing the thousands upon thousands of clocks that filled the basement, crowded on shelves, standing against the walls, spread across the floor,

and holding in their midst by a fantastic spiderweb of wires a closed coffin that seemed to float a few inches above the rug. It was as if the clocks had grown there, proliferating. He had long since give up wondering if there were more of them now than there had once been.

His mind could supply no explanation, but he knew that somehow, if even one clock in the whole house remained running—and somehow, in defiance of all reason, one or more would always keep running for a whole year, awaiting his return—on this one night in November time would stop, or perhaps slide backwards, and Edith would be as she had been the night before her death, loving him, never aware of any future, forever young while he continued to age. He didn't know if it was real or not. There no longer seemed to be such things as real and unreal.

But he could never, never bring himself to put an end to it, and he wept as he made his way gingerly among the clocks, winding each one. Their voices grew louder and louder, resonating in the cramped basement, while he wept and trembled and worked with furious, desperate care, and in the end the sound of them was like screaming.

The Closed Door

by Harold Ward

Dying, Obie Marsh cursed his wife as he had cursed her every day of their wedded life.

"You've poisoned me!" he gasped, writhing in agony. "Yes, you've poisoned me, you she-devil!"

Lucinda, his wife, nodded dully.

"Yes, I poisoned you," she answered without emotion. "You are going to die, anyway; the doctor said so. It's just a matter of time—maybe years, maybe months. And I can't stand this fightin' any longer. Fifteen years of it! Fifteen years of hell!"

"Damn you!" Marsh snarled through his clenched teeth, his bearded face twitching as a spasm of pain shot through his vitals.

"We should have never got married," the woman went on quietly.

"I never loved you and you never loved me. 'T was a case of your folks and my folks stickin' in between us and the ones we loved. You've always hated me 'cause of Lizzie Roper, an' God knows I wanted t' marry Al Sides. Just 'cause they wanted the farms joined, they made us get married, me an' you. Now we can't get a divorce 'cause of the church and I've just got sick of it all, Obie—sick of it all."

"You hellion!" he gasped, his body twitching spasmodically.

"I got the idee of poisoning you when you first took sick," she went on in the same even tone. "Old Doc Plummer said that you might linger along for years. And I just couldn't stand it, Obie—I just couldn't stand it any longer, your constant bullyin' an' runnin' over me."

"You'll hang for it," Marsh said huskily. "I hope they torture you in hell—"

"Probably they will," Lucinda Marsh answered without emotion. "But it's worth it t' have a little peace here on earth. It hasn't been any heaven livin' with you."

Marsh twisted convulsively, his gnarled fingers closing and unclosing, his thick lips drooling. He pulled himself together with a mighty effort. He was a hard man and strong; hard men are difficult to kill.

"I'll come back . . . from th' grave, you hussy!" he gasped.

"'T would be like you," his wife answered.

". . . Waitin' for . . . you—" he went on, trying to shake his fist in the woman's face.

The effort was too great. He dropped back upon the pillow again, the sweat standing out on his forehead in beads, his body shaking with spasms.

"God, it hurts!" he whispered. "Just like a . . . knife."

The woman suddenly lifted her head. She was listening.

"Somebody coming," she muttered, moving swiftly to the window. A roadster was entering the lane.

"It's old Doc Plummer," she said, half to herself, half to the dying man. "Th' old fool's earlier'n usual. An' you c'n still talk."

The man on the bed quivered. His fists clenched and his muscles tensed as he tried to drag himself back from the yawning pit that awaited him.

". . . Getting . . . dark—"

"Doc's liable to rec'nize th' symptoms," the woman went on as she heard the car come to a stop in the front yard. A sheet had been thrown carelessly across the foot of the bed. Seizing it, she wadded it into a bundle and pressed it against the face of the dying man. He

fought against the stoppage of his breath with a feeble effort. She threw her whole strength against him. Suddenly his limbs straightened jerkily. She knew that he was dead. She sat up with a sigh of relief.

The outside screen door slammed shut. Leaping to her feet, she threw the sheet across the back of a chair and turned to meet the doctor.

"He just passed away in one of those spells," she said without emotion. "Come on him all of a sudden. Both th' kids are at school and I didn't have nobody to send for you. 'Tain't no use to say I'm sorry, for I'm not. I'm glad he's dead."

The physician shook his head sympathetically. Like all country practitioners, he was conversant with the family affairs of his patients. For a moment he stood looking down at the still form of Obie Marsh. Then he pulled a sheet over it and turned to the woman.

"Better sit down and take things easy, Mrs. Marsh," he said, following her into the other room. "I'll notify the undertaker and stop at the school and have the teacher send Mary and Jimmy home. Anybody else you want?"

She shook her head negatively.

"Tell Bill Reynolds to come prepared t' take th' body back with him," she said slowly. "This is my house, now—mine. That's th' way my pap and his pap fixed up th' deeds. An' the quicker I get him outen my sight, th' better it'll suit me. I never want t' see him again 'till th' day of th' funeral, an' I wouldn't 'tend that if it wasn't that people'd talk.

"He made life hell for me," she went on bitterly. "I've hated him from th' day I married him. It's my house now and I'm goin' t' lock that room as soon's they take him away. I never want t' see th' inside of it again. There's too many mem'ries hovering around it. I'd burn it to th' ground if it wasn't for burnin' th' rest of th' house."

She dropped into a rocking-chair and gazed at the doctor, her gaunt body quivering with unshed tears. The physician patted her on the shoulder sympathetically.

"You're overwrought, Lucinda," he said kindly, "overwrought and nervous. I'll fix up a tonic and bring it over tonight."

"I don't need no tonic," she responded. "Knowin' he's dead'll be tonic enough for me."

The physician wagged his head solemnly.

"Let's not speak ill of the dead," he said. "Everybody knows how he treated you. If there's nothing else I can do, I'll be getting along."

In due time the undertaker and his assistant came with their narrow

wicker basket. Lucinda Marsh stood beside the door and waited for them as they carried their burden out. They looked at her queerly as she turned the key in the lock, then, removing it, placed it in her pocket.

"I hope t' God I never see th' inside of that room till my dyin' day," she said.

Bill Reynolds, the undertaker, shook his head in agreement. He, too, knew the life that she had led with Obie Marsh.

The passing years brought little change in the outward appearance of Lucinda Marsh. Gaunt, hard-featured, tight-lipped and unemotional, she moved about the farm as of yore, doing a man's work in the field, adding to the dollars that were already in the bank, conducting her business along the lines to which she had been trained. She had never had friends; Obie Marsh had seen to that. She made none now.

Her children grew to manhood and womanhood. Little Mary married and moved to the adjoining township. Lucinda made no complaint and no comment. Jimmy took the place of the hired man, lifting a bit of the burden of labor from his mother's shoulders. But she still held the reins of management. Then he, too, married and brought his wife to the big, gloomy old house at the end of the lane. Children came, six in quick succession. If their happy laughter wrought any change in the heart of the grim, silent old woman, she never showed it. Emma, Jimmy's wife, busy rearing her brood, was content to remain in the background; Lucinda Marsh was still mistress of the house.

Through all the years that one room just off from the parlor—Father's room, they called it—remained closed, the key hidden away in Lucinda's bureau drawer. It was never mentioned in the family circle. The children knew that there was something—some horrible taboo—that kept it from being talked about. Their childish imaginations did the rest. They passed it with baited breath; when darkness fell and shadows hovered outside the circle made by the big kerosene lamp on the center table, they always played on the other side of the room, casting furtive glances toward the dark panels behind which lurked they knew not what.

Then, with the passing of the years, came the hard times. First the grasshoppers destroyed the crops. Then came the drought. Prices went up; wages dropped. Factories closed.

Mary was the first to feel the blow. The bank foreclosed on her husband's farm. Then came illness and another baby. Finally she was forced to come home with her sick husband and her little brood. Lucinda Marsh, as unemotional as ever, made room for them. Jimmy's

wife's brother lost his place in the city. Destitute, he appealed to his sister. She told her troubles to Lucinda Marsh.

"Four more won't make no difference at th' table," the old woman said grimly. "Write an' tell 'em we'll make room for 'em somehow. Goodness knows, though, where we'll sleep 'em."

They were sitting at the supper table when this conversation took place. It was Mary who, with a quick glance at her brother, ventured to speak that which was in all of their minds.

"Father's room," she said timidly. "Couldn't we open that up and air it before they come and let 'em sleep in there?"

For a moment there was an awed silence. Lucinda Marsh turned her sunken eyes on her daughter, then glanced at the faces of the others.

"I vowed that I'd never set foot in that room 'till my dyin' day," she said finally.

"But they—they wouldn't be you, Mother," Mary argued. "And we're cramped for room right now. Where else can we sleep 'em?"

Lucinda Marsh quietly laid down her knife and fork, her thin lips set in a straight, grim line.

"If anybody sleeps in that room, 't will be me," she said finally. "I lived with your father for fifteen years, hatin' him every day more'n more. And he hated me worse'n I hated him—if such a thing is possible. The room's filled with our hatred—it's locked up in there smolderin' an' ready t' be fanned into flame again."

"But, Mother—"

Lucinda Marsh straightened her bent old shoulders with a gesture of finality.

"I'll move into it," she said grimly.

"I wish that I hadn't mentioned it," Mary said regretfully. "I knew that there was some sort of sentiment attached to it, but—"

The old woman cut her off.

"Sentiment! Hate, you mean," she snapped. "But maybe it's for th' best. I'm an old woman—'way past seventy. I'm about due to die, anyway."

She stopped, her aged eyes taking on a far-away look.

"Maybe it's foreordained," she said, half to herself. "He said that he'd be . . . waitin' for me. Maybe he is. Who knows?"

She rose from the table and took a step toward the door.

"I'll open it up in the mornin' and let it air out," she said.

She moved up the stairway to the upper floor, her lips straight and tight.

* * *

For a long time Lucinda Marsh sat in the straight-backed chair beside her bed, her weary eyes gazing into vacancy while the panorama of the years unfolded itself. To her had come a great urge, a desire which she had kept in leash for close to half a century—the longing that comes to all murderers—a yearning to visit the scene of her crime.

A thousand times before, the same desire had swept over her and she had always fought it off. Now, however, with the fulfilment of her wish only a few hours away there had come to her a seeming need for haste. The closed room was calling to her. Within her brain a voice was shrieking: "*Now! Now!*" To her aged mind it was the voice of the man she hated—the man she had killed.

Getting up, she went to the bureau and, opening the drawer, found the key where she had hidden it so many years before. She held it in her gnarled fingers, fondling it, crooning over it.

Her room was at the head of the stairs. One by one, she heard the members of the household go to their rooms. Finally the gloomy old house was filled with an indescribable quietness.

Rising, she opened the door a tiny crack and peered out into the dark hallway. Satisfied that all were asleep, she picked up the small hand-lamp and tiptoed furtively down the creaking stairs.

A storm was in the air. She could hear the wind rising and shrieking through the branches of the trees. There was something reminiscent about the mournful wail. She stopped a moment, her head bent forward. Then remembrance swept over her.

"'T was like this th' night before—before he died," she muttered to herself.

Her heart was beating a trifle faster as she reached the dark, grim door. She hesitated an instant. Then, transferring the lamp to her left hand, she inserted the key in the lock. It turned hard, as if reluctant to reveal the mysteries it hid. Then the tumbler shot back. For a moment she waited, her fingers on the knob. She was trembling now—shaking with an emotion she did not understand.

"He said that . . . he'd be . . . waitin' for me," she murmured. "I wonder . . . if he is."

She turned the knob and pushed against the panel. The aged hinges squeaked protestingly. Then the door swung open. A wave of malignancy and hatred surged over her.

She stepped inside, her lips closed in a tight, grim line. Just inside the door she waited, the lamp held high above her head, her eyes taking in every detail. There was the bed, unmade, where he had died. The thought came to her that Bill Reynolds, the undertaker, the last person to step foot in the room, was gone, too. At the head of the bed

was the little stand; on top of it was the glass in which she had administered the poison. Beside it was a bottle of medicine, half empty; the label, covered with old Doc Plummer's crabbed hieroglyphics, was yellow and faded. Doc Plummer . . . he, too, had been festering in his grave for years. There was the pillow where Obie's head had rested when he died; one corner was twisted where he had held it when the last spasm of agony had knifed its way through his vitals. Nothing was changed.

"He said that he'd . . . be waitin' for me," she said again.

The room was musty and mildewed, the dust of years over everything. She closed the door and set the lamp upon the little stand. Going to the window, she pushed it up to its full length. The wind swept in, howling and shrieking.

The lamp sputtered, causing queer, grotesque shadows to dance in the distant corners. Across the back of the chair where she had thrown it years before was the yellowed sheet with which she had smothered the dying breath out of her husband. There was a darker spot upon its mildewed surface; she knew it for the spittle that had drooled from his mouth.

She moved to the center of the room, still peering furtively into the shadows.

"He said that he'd come . . . back from th' grave an' be . . . waitin' for me," she said again and again.

A fresh gust of wind howled through the window. The lamp sputtered, smoked, flared up, then went out.

With the sudden darkness came a feeling of dread. For the first time in her life Lucinda Marsh was afraid.

Out of the darkness came a thing—a shapeless thing of white. For a moment it hung suspended in midair. It hovered over her, its long, shapeless arms reaching out for her. The wind shrieked with merry gusto.

". . . said that he'd be waitin'—" she murmured.

It swept over her, holding her in its folds, twisting about her, smothering her. . . .

"God!" she shrieked, clawing at the enveloping tentacles. "He kept his word! He was . . . waitin'—"

In the morning they found her. Twisted about her head and throat was a yellowed sheet—the sheet with which she had smothered her husband.

The Coat

by A. E. D. Smith

I am quite aware that the other fellows in the office regard me as something of an oddity—as being rather a ‘queer bird’, in fact. Well, of course, a man who happens to be of a studious disposition, who dislikes noise and prefers his own company to that of empty-headed companions, and who, moreover, is compelled by defective vision to wear thick glasses, is always liable to be thus misjudged by inferior minds; and ordinarily, I treat the opinion of my colleagues with the contempt it deserves. But at this particular moment I was beginning to think that perhaps, after all, there might be something to be said for their view. For, though I might still repudiate the ‘queer bird’ part of the business, undoubtedly I was an ass—a first-class chump; otherwise I should have been spending my holidays in a nice comfortable way with the rest of the normal world, listening to the Pierrots or winking at the girls on the promenade of some seaside resort at home, instead of having elected to set out alone on this idiotic push-bike tour of a little-known part of France. Drenched, hungry and lost; a stranger in a strange land; dispiritedly pushing before me a heavily-laden bicycle with a gashed tyre—such was the present result of my asinine choice.

The storm had overtaken me miles from anywhere, on a wild road over a spur of the Vosges, and for nearly two hours I had trudged through the pelting rain without encountering a living soul or the least sign of human habitation.

And then, at long last, rounding a bend, I glimpsed just ahead of me the chimney-pots and gables of a fair-sized house. It was a lonely, desolate-looking place standing amid a clump of trees a little way back from the road, and somehow, even at a distance, did not convey a very inviting impression. Nevertheless, in that wilderness, it was a welcome enough sight, and in the hope of finding temporary shelter and possibly a little badly-needed refreshment, I quickened my pace towards it. Two hundred yards brought me to the entrance gates, and here I suffered a grievous disappointment; for the roofless porter’s lodge, the dilapidated old gates hanging askew on their hinges, and the overgrown drive beyond, plainly indicated that the place was no longer inhabited.

I speedily comforted myself, however, with the reflection that in the circumstances even a deserted house was not to be despised as a refuge. Once under cover of some kind, I might make shift to wring out my drenched clothing and repair my damaged mount; and without further ado I pushed my bicycle up the long-neglected drive and reached the terrace in front of the house itself. It proved to be an old château, half smothered in creepers and vines that had long gone wild, and, judging by the carved stone coat-of-arms over the main entrance, had once been occupied by a person of some quality. Mounted on a pedestal on either side of the iron-studded front door stood a rusty carronade—trophies, probably, of some long-forgotten war in which the former occupier had played a part. Most of the windows had been boarded up, and it was evident that the place had stood empty for many years.

I tried the front door. To my surprise it was unfastened, and a thrust of my shoulder sent it creaking grudgingly back on its hinges. My nostrils, as I stepped into the dim, wide hall, were at once assailed by the stale, disagreeable odour of rotting woodwork and mouldy hangings and carpets. For a moment or two I stood peering uncertainly about me, with the slight feeling of eeriness that one usually experiences when entering an old, empty house. Facing me was a broad staircase, with a long, stained-glass window, almost opaque with dirt and cobwebs, at its head. I mounted the stairs, and throwing open the first door at hand, found myself looking into a spacious, handsomely furnished room that had evidently once been the chief apartment of the house, though long neglect and disuse had now reduced it to a sorry state. The ornate cornice hung here and there in strips, and in one corner the plaster of the ceiling had come down altogether. Green mould covered the eighteenth-century furniture; curtains and draperies hung in tatters; and one half of the beautiful old Persian carpet, from a point near the door right across to the fireplace, was overspread by an evil-smelling, bright orange fungus.

The fireplace gave me an idea. Could I but find fuel I might light a fire, make myself a hot drink, and get my clothes properly dried.

A little searching in the outbuildings discovered a sufficient quantity of old sticks to serve my purpose, and with a bundle of them under my coat I re-entered the house and briskly made my way upstairs again. But on the threshold of the big room, without quite knowing why, I suddenly checked. It was as though my legs, of their own volition, had all at once become reluctant to carry me farther into the apartment—as if something quite outside of me were urging me to turn about and retreat. I laid the sticks down at my feet, and for a moment or two

stood there uncertainly in the doorway. I was beginning to sense some subtle suggestion of danger in the atmosphere of the place. Everything was apparently just as I had left it; yet I had an uneasy sort of feeling that during my brief absence something evil had entered that room and left it again.

I am neither a nervous nor a superstitious person; yet I found myself, a moment later, rather shamefacedly picking up my sticks and moving back towards the head of the stairs. Actually, it was not so much fear as a vague, precautionary sense of uneasiness that prompted me. It had occurred to me that perhaps I might feel more comfortable if I remained nearer to the front door, and made my fire in one of the rooms on the ground floor. If—it was an idiotic fancy, I know—but . . . well, if anything—er—queer DID happen, and I had to make a sudden bolt for it, I could get out quicker that way.

It was on this second descent of the stairs, as I faced the light from the open front door, that I suddenly noticed something that pulled me up with a decided start. Running up the centre of the staircase, and quite fresh in the thick dust, was a broad, broken sort of track, exactly as though someone had recently trailed up an empty sack or something of that nature.

From the foot of the staircase I traced this track across the hall to a spot immediately below an old, moth-eaten coat that hung from one of a row of coat-pegs on the opposite wall. And then I saw that similar tracks traversed the hall in various directions, some terminating before the doors on either side, others leading past the foot of the stairs to the rear regions of the house, but all seeming to radiate from the same point below the coat-pegs. And the queerest thing about it all was that of footprints, other than my own, there was not a sign.

Uneasiness once more assailed me. The house appeared to be uninhabited, and yet, plainly someone, or something, had recently been in the place. Who, or what, was the restless, questing creature that had made those strange tracks to and from the old coat? Was it some half-witted vagrant—a woman possibly—whose trailing draperies obliterated her own footprints?

I had a closer look at the old garment. It was a military greatcoat of ancient pattern with one or two tarnished silver buttons still attached to it, and had evidently seen much service. Turning it round on its peg with a gingerly finger and thumb, I discovered that just below the left shoulder there was a round hole as big as a penny, surrounded by an area of scorched and stained cloth, as though a heavy pistol had been fired into it at point-blank range. If a pistol bullet had indeed made

that hole, then obviously, the old coat at one period of its existence had clothed a dead man.

A sudden repugnance for the thing overcame me, and with a slight shudder I let go of it. It may have been fancy or not, but all at once it seemed to me that there was more than an odour of mould and rotting cloth emanating from the thing—that there was a taint of putrefying flesh and bone. . . .

A taint of animal corruption—faint but unmistakable—I could sniff it in the air; and with it, something less definable but no less real—a sort of sixth-sense feeling that the whole atmosphere of the place was slowly becoming charged with evil emanations from a black and shameful past.

With an effort I pulled myself together. After all, what was there to be scared about? I had no need to fear human marauders, for in my hip pocket I carried a small but serviceable automatic; and as for ghosts, well, if such existed, they didn't usually 'walk' in the daytime. The place certainly felt creepy, and I shouldn't have cared to spend the night there; but it would be ridiculous to allow mere idle fancies to drive me out again into that beastly rain before I'd made myself that badly needed hot drink and mended my bicycle.

I therefore opened the door nearest to me, and entered a smallish room that apparently had once been used as a study. The fireplace was on the side opposite to the door, and the wide, ancient grate was still choked with the ashes of the last log consumed there. I picked up the poker—a cumbersome old thing with a knob as big as an orange—raked out the ashes, and laid my sticks in approved Boy Scout fashion. But the wood was damp, and after I had used up half my matches, refused to do more than smoulder, whilst a back-draught from the chimney filled the room with smoke. In desperation I went down on my hands and knees and tried to rouse the embers into flame by blowing on them. And in the middle of this irksome operation I was startled by a sound of movement in the hall—a single soft 'flop', as though some one had flung down a garment.

I was on my feet in a flash, listening with every nerve a-taut. No further sound came, and, automatic in hand, I tiptoed to the door. There was nothing in the hall; nothing to be heard at all save the steady swish of the rain outside. But from a spot on the floor directly below the old coat the dust was rising in a little eddying cloud, as though it had just been disturbed.

'Pah! A rat,' I told myself, and went back to my task.

More vigorous blowing on the embers, more raking and poking,

more striking of matches—and, in the midst of it, again came that curious noise—not very loud, but plain and unmistakable.

Once more I went into the hall, and once more, except for another little cloud of dust rising from precisely the same spot as before, there was nothing to be seen. But that sixth-sense warning of imminent danger was becoming more insistent. I had the feeling now that I was no longer alone in the old, empty hall—that some unclean, invisible presence was lurking there, tainting the very air with its foulness.

‘It’s no use,’ I said to myself. ‘I may be a nervous fool, but I can’t stand any more of this. I’ll collect my traps and clear out whilst the going’s good.’

With this, I went back into the room, and keeping a nervous eye cocked on the door, began with rather panicky haste to re-pack my haversack. And just as I was in the act of tightening the last strap there came from the hall a low, evil chuckle, followed by the sound of stealthy movement. I whipped out my weapon and stood where I was in the middle of the floor, facing the door, with my blood turning to ice. Through the chink between the door hinges I saw a shadow pass; then the door creaked a little, slowly began to open, and round it there came—the COAT.

It stood there upright in the doorway, as God is above me—swaying a little as though uncertain of its balance—collar and shoulders extended as though by an invisible wearer—the old, musty coat I had seen hanging in the hall.

For a space that seemed an eternity I stood like a man of stone, facing the Thing as it seemed to pause on the threshold. A dreadful sort of hypnotism held me rooted to the spot on which I stood—a hypnotism that completely paralysed my body, and caused the pistol to slip from my nerveless fingers, and yet left my brain clear. Mingled with my frozen terror was a feeling of deadly nausea. I knew that I was in the presence of ultimate Evil—that the very aura of the Hell-engendered Thing reared there in the doorway was contamination—that its actual touch would mean not only the instant destruction of my body, but the everlasting damnation of my soul.

And now It was coming into the room—with an indescribable bobbing sort of motion, the empty sleeves jerking grotesquely at its sides, the skirts flopping and trailing in the dust, was slowly coming towards me; and step by step, with my bulging eyes riveted in awful fascination on the Thing, I was recoiling before it. Step by step, with the rigid, unconscious movement of an automaton, I drew back until I was brought up with my back pressed into the fireplace and could retreat no farther. And still, with deadly malevolent purpose, the Thing crept

towards me. The empty sleeves were rising and shakily reaching out towards my throat. In another moment they would touch me, and then I knew with the most dreadful certainty that my reason would snap. A coherent thought somehow came into my burning brain—something that I had read or heard of long ago . . . the power . . . of the . . . holy sign . . . against . . . the forces of evil. With a last desperate effort of will I stretched out a palsied finger and made the sign of the Cross. . . . And in that instant, my other hand, scrabbling frenziedly at the wall behind me, came into contact with something cold and hard and round. It was the knob of the old, heavy poker.

The touch of the cold iron seemed to give me instant re-possession of my faculties. With lightning swiftness I swung up the heavy poker and struck with all my force at the nightmare Horror before me. And lo! on the instant, the Thing collapsed, and became an old coat—nothing more—lying there in a heap at my feet. Yet, on my oath, as I cleared the hellish thing in a flying leap, and fled from the room, I saw it, out of the tail of my eye, gathering itself together and making shape, as it were, to scramble after me.

Once outside that accursed house I ran as never man ran before, and I remember nothing more until I found myself, half fainting, before the door of a little inn.

'Bring wine in the name of God!' I cried, staggering inside.

Wine was brought, and a little wondering group stood round me while I drank.

I tried to explain to them in my bad French. They continued to regard me with puzzled looks. At length a look of understanding came into the landlord's face.

'Mon dieu!' he gasped. 'Is it possible that Monsieur has been in *that place*? Quick, Juliette! Monsieur will need another bottle of wine.'

Later, I got something of the story from the landlord, though he was by no means eager to tell it. The deserted house had once been occupied by a retired officer of the first Napoleon's army—a semi-madman with a strain of African blood in him. Judging from the landlord's story, he must have been one of the worst men that God ever allowed to walk the earth. 'Most certainly, monsieur, he was a bad man—that one,' concluded my host. 'He killed his wife and tortured every living thing he could lay hands on—even, it is said, his own daughters. In the end, one of them shot him in the back. The old château has an evil name. If you offered a million francs, you would not get one of our country-folks to go near the place.'

* * *

As I said at the beginning, I know that the other fellows in the office are inclined, as it is, to regard me as being a bit queer; so I haven't told any of them this story. Nevertheless, it's perfectly true.

My brand-new bicycle and touring traps are probably still lying where I left them in the hall of that devil-ridden château. Anybody who cares to collect them may keep them.

The Cold Embrace

by Mary E. Braddon

He was an artist—such things as happened to him happen sometimes to artists.

He was a German—such things as happened to him happen sometimes to Germans.

He was young, handsome, studious, enthusiastic, metaphysical, reckless, unbelieving, heartless.

And being young, handsome and eloquent, he was beloved.

He was an orphan, under the guardianship of his dead father's brother, his uncle Wilhelm, in whose house he had been brought up from a little child; and she who loved him was his cousin—his cousin Gertrude, whom he swore he loved in return.

Did he love her? Yes, when he first swore it. It soon wore out, this passionate love; how threadbare and wretched a sentiment it became at last in the selfish heart of the student! But in its first golden dawn, when he was only nineteen, and had just returned from his apprenticeship to a great painter at Antwerp, and they wandered together in the most romantic outskirts of the city at rosy sunset, by holy moonlight, or bright and joyous morning, how beautiful a dream!

They keep it a secret from Wilhelm, as he has the father's ambition of a wealthy suitor for his only child—a cold and dreary vision beside the lover's dream.

So they are betrothed; and standing side by side when the dying sun and the pale rising moon divide the heavens, he puts the betrothal ring upon her finger, the white and taper finger whose slender shape he

knows so well. This ring is a peculiar one, a massive golden serpent, its tail in its mouth, the symbol of eternity; it had been his mother's, and he would know it amongst a thousand. If he were to become blind tomorrow, he could select it from amongst a thousand by the touch alone.

He places it on her finger, and they swear to be true to each other for ever and ever—through trouble and danger—sorrow and change—in wealth or poverty. Her father must needs be won to consent to their union by-and-by, for they were now betrothed, and death alone could part them.

But the young student, the scoffer at revelation, yet the enthusiastic adorer of the mystical asks:

'Can death part us? I would return to you from the grave, Gertrude. My soul would come back to be near my love. And you—you, if you died before me—the cold earth would not hold you from me; if you loved me, you would return, and again these fair arms would be clasped round my neck as they are now.'

But she told him, with a holier light in her deep-blue eyes than had ever shone in his—she told him that the dead who die at peace with God are happy in heaven, and cannot return to the troubled earth; and that it is only the suicide—the lost wretch on whom sorrowful angels shut the door of Paradise—whose unholy spirit haunts the footsteps of the living.

The first year of their betrothal is passed, and she is alone, for he has gone to Italy, on a commission for some rich man, to copy Raphaels, Titians, Guidos, in a gallery at Florence. He has gone to win fame, perhaps; but it is not the less bitter—he is gone!

Of course her father misses his young nephew, who has been as a son to him; and he thinks his daughter's sadness no more than a cousin should feel for a cousin's absence.

In the meantime, the weeks and months pass. The lover writes—often at first, then seldom—at last, not at all.

How many excuses she invents for him! How many times she goes to the distant little post-office, to which he is to address his letters! How many times she hopes, only to be disappointed! How many times she despairs, only to hope again!

But real despair comes at last, and will not be put off any more. The rich suitor appears on the scene, and her father is determined. She is to marry at once. The wedding-day is fixed—the fifteenth of June.

The date seems burnt into her brain.

The date, written in fire, dances for ever before her eyes.

The date, shrieked by the Furies, sounds continually in her ears.

But there is time yet—it is the middle of May—there is time for a letter to reach him at Florence; there is time for him to come to Brunswick, to take her away and marry her, in spite of her father—in spite of the whole world.

But the days and weeks fly by, and he does not write—he does not come. This is indeed despair which usurps her heart, and will not be put away.

It is the fourteenth of June. For the last time she goes to the little post-office; for the last time she asks the old question, and they give her for the last time the dreary answer, 'No; no letter.'

For the last time—for tomorrow is the day appointed for her bridal. Her father will hear no entreaties; her rich suitor will not listen to her prayers. They will not be put off a day—an hour; tonight alone is hers—this night, which she may employ as she will.

She takes another path than that which leads home; she hurries through some by-streets of the city, out on to a lonely bridge, where he and she had stood so often in the sunset, watching the rose-coloured light glow, fade, and die upon the river.

He returns from Florence. He had received her letter. That letter, blotted with tears, entreating, despairing—he had received it, but he loved her no longer. A young Florentine, who has sat to him for a model, had bewitched his fancy—that fancy which with him stood in place of a heart—and Gertrude had been half-forgotten. If she had a rich suitor, good; let her marry him; better for her, better far for himself. He had no wish to fetter himself with a wife. Had he not his art always?—his eternal bride, his unchanging mistress.

Thus he thought it wiser to delay his journey to Brunswick, so that he should arrive when the wedding was over—arrive in time to salute the bride.

And the vows—the mystical fancies—the belief in his return, even after death, to the embrace of his beloved? O, gone out of his life; melted away for ever, those foolish dreams of his boyhood.

So on the fifteenth of June he enters Brunswick, by that very bridge on which she stood, the stars looking down on her, the night before. He strolls across the bridge and down by the water's edge, a great rough dog at his heels, and the smoke from his short meerschaum-pipe curling in blue wreaths fantastically in the pure morning air. He has his sketch-book under his arm, and attracted now and then by some object that catches his artist's eye, stops to draw: a few weeds and pebbles on the river's brink—a crag on the opposite shore—a group of pollard

willows in the distance. When he has done, he admires his drawing, shuts his sketch-book, empties the ashes from his pipe, refills from his tobacco-pouch, sings the refrain of a gay drinking-song, calls to his dog, smokes again, and walks on. Suddenly he opens his sketch-book again; this time that which attracts him is a group of figures: but what is it?

It is not a funeral, for there are no mourners.

It is not a funeral, but a corpse lying on a rough bier, covered with an old sail, carried between two bearers.

It is not a funeral, for the bearers are fishermen—fishermen in their everyday garb.

About a hundred yards from him they rest their burden on a bank—one stands at the head of the bier, the other throws himself down at the foot of it.

And thus they form a perfect group; he walks back two or three paces, selects his point of sight, and begins to sketch a hurried outline. He has finished it before they move; he hears their voices, though he cannot hear their words, and wonders what they can be talking of. Presently he walks on and joins them.

‘You have a corpse there, my friends?’ he says.

‘Yes; a corpse washed ashore an hour ago.’

‘Drowned?’

‘Yes, drowned. A young girl, very handsome.’

‘Suicides are always handsome,’ says the painter; and then he stands for a little while idly smoking and meditating, looking at the sharp outline of the corpse and the stiff folds of the rough canvas covering.

Life is such a golden holiday for him—young, ambitious, clever—that it seems as though sorrow and death could have no part in his destiny.

At last he says that, as this poor suicide is so handsome, he should like to make a sketch of her.

He gives the fishermen some money, and they offer to remove the sailcloth that covers her features.

No; he will do it himself. He lifts the rough, coarse, wet canvas from her face. What face?

The face that shone on the dreams of his foolish boyhood; the face which once was the light of his uncle’s home. His cousin Gertrude—his betrothed!

He sees, as in one glance, while he draws one breath, the rigid features—the marble arms—the hands crossed on the cold bosom; and, on the third finger of the left hand, the ring which had been his

mother's—the golden serpent; the ring which, if he were to become blind, he could select from a thousand others by the touch alone.

But he is a genius and a metaphysician—grief, true grief, is not for such as he. His first thought is flight—flight anywhere out of that accursed city—anywhere far from the brink of that hideous river—anywhere away from remorse—anywhere to forget.

He is miles on the road that leads away from Brunswick before he knows that he has walked a step.

It is only when his dog lies down panting at his feet than he feels how exhausted he is himself, and sits down upon a bank to rest. How the landscape spins round and round before his dazzled eyes, while his morning's sketch of the two fishermen and the canvas-covered bier glares redly at him out of the twilight!

At last, after sitting a long time by the roadside, idly playing with his dog, idly smoking, idly lounging, looking as any idle, light-hearted travelling student might look, yet all the while acting over that morning's scene in his burning brain a hundred times a minute; at last he grows a little more composed, and tries presently to think of himself as he is, apart from his cousin's suicide. Apart from that, he was no worse off than he was yesterday. His genius was not gone; the money he had earned at Florence still lined his pocket-book; he was his own master, free to go whither he would.

And while he sits on the roadside, trying to separate himself from the scene of that morning—trying to put away the image of the corpse covered with the damp canvas sail—trying to think of what he should do next, where he should go, to be farthest away from Brunswick and remorse, the old diligence comes rumbling and jingling along. He remembers it; it goes from Brunswick to Aix-la-Chapelle.

He whistles to his dog, shouts to the postillion to stop, and springs into the *coupé*.

During the whole evening, through the long night, though he does not once close his eyes, he never speaks a word; but when morning dawns, and the other passengers awake and begin to talk to each other, he joins in the conversation. He tells them that he is an artist, that he is going to Cologne and to Antwerp to copy Rubenses, and the great picture by Quentin Matsys, in the museum. He remembered afterwards that he talked and laughed boisterously, and that when he was talking and laughing loudest, a passenger, older and graver than the rest, opened the window near him, and told him to put his head out. He remembered the fresh air blowing in his face, the singing of the birds in his ears, and the flat fields and roadside reeling before his eyes.

He remembered this, and then falling in a lifeless heap on the floor of the diligence.

It is a fever that keeps him for six long weeks on a bed at a hotel in Aix-la-Chapelle.

He gets well, and, accompanied by his dog, starts on foot for Cologne. By this time he is his former self once more. Again the blue smoke from his short meerschaum curls upwards in the morning air—again he sings some old university drinking-song—again stops here and there, meditating and sketching.

He is happy, and has forgotten his cousin—and so on to Cologne.

It is by the great cathedral he is standing, with his dog at his side. It is night, the bells have just chimed the hour, and the clocks are striking eleven; the moonlight shines full upon the magnificent pile, over which the artist's eye wanders, absorbed in the beauty of form.

He is not thinking of his drowned cousin, for he has forgotten her and is happy.

Suddenly some one, something from behind him, puts two cold arms round his neck, and clasps its hands on his breast.

And yet there is no one behind him, for on the flags bathed in the broad moonlight there are only two shadows, his own and his dog's. He turns quickly round—there is no one—nothing to be seen in the broad square but himself and his dog; and though he feels, he cannot see the cold arms clasped round his neck.

It is not ghostly, this embrace, for it is palpable to the touch—it cannot be real, for it is invisible.

He tries to throw off the cold caress. He clasps the hands in his own to tear them asunder, and to cast them off his neck. He can feel the long delicate fingers cold and wet beneath his touch, and on the third finger of the left hand he can feel the ring which was his mother's—the golden serpent—the ring which he has always said he would know among a thousand by the touch alone. He knows it now!

His dead cousin's cold arms are round his neck—his dead cousin's wet hands are clasped upon his breast. He asks himself if he is mad. 'Up, Leo!' he shouts. 'Up, up, boy!' and the Newfoundland leaps to his shoulders—the dog's paws are on the dead hands, and the animal utters a terrific howl, and springs away from his master.

The student stands in the moonlight, the dead arms around his neck, and the dog at a little distance moaning piteously.

Presently a watchman, alarmed by the howling of the dog, comes into the square to see what is wrong.

In a breath the cold arms are gone.

He takes the watchman home to the hotel with him and gives him

money; in his gratitude he could have given that man half his little fortune.

Will it ever come to him again, this embrace of the dead?

He tries never to be alone; he makes a hundred acquaintances, and shares the chamber of another student. He starts up if he is left by himself in the public room at the inn where he is staying, and runs into the street. People notice his strange actions, and begin to think that he is mad.

But, in spite of all, he is alone once more; for one night the public room being empty for a moment, when on some idle pretence he strolls into the street, the street is empty too, and for the second time he feels the cold arms round his neck, and for the second time, when he calls his dog, the animal slinks away from him with a piteous howl.

After this he leaves Cologne, still travelling on foot—of necessity now, for his money is getting low. He joins travelling hawkers, he walks side by side with labourers, he talks to every foot-passenger he falls in with, and tries from morning till night to get company on the road.

At night he sleeps by the fire in the kitchen of the inn at which he stops; but do what he will, he is often alone, and it is now a common thing for him to feel the cold arms around his neck.

Many months have passed since his cousin's death—autumn, winter, early spring. His money is nearly gone, his health is utterly broken, he is the shadow of his former self, and he is getting near to Paris. He will reach that city at the time of the Carnival. To this he looks forward. In Paris, in Carnival time, he need never, surely, be alone, never feel that deadly caress; he may even recover his lost gaiety, his lost health, once more resume his profession, once more earn fame and money by his art.

How hard he tries to get over the distance that divides him from Paris, while day by day he grows weaker, and his step slower and more heavy!

But there is an end at last; the long dreary roads are passed. This is Paris, which he enters for the first time—Paris, of which he has dreamed so much—Paris, whose million voices are to exorcise his phantom.

To him tonight Paris seems one vast chaos of lights, music, and confusion—lights which dance before his eyes and will not be still—music that rings in his ears and deafens him—confusion which makes his head whirl round and round.

But, in spite of all, he finds the opera-house, where there is a masked ball. He has enough money left to buy a ticket of admission,

and to hire a domino to throw over his shabby dress. It seems only a moment after his entering the gates of Paris that he is in the very midst of all the wild gaiety of the opera house ball.

No more darkness, no more loneliness, but a mad crowd, shouting and dancing, and a lovely Débardeuse hanging on his arm.

The boisterous gaiety he feels surely is his old light heartedness come back. He hears the people round him talking of the outrageous conduct of some drunken student, and it is to him they point when they say this—to him, who has not moistened his lips since yesterday at noon, for even now he will not drink; though his lips are parched, and his throat burning, he cannot drink. His voice is thick and hoarse, and his utterance indistinct; but still this must be his old light heartedness come back that makes him so wildly gay.

The little Débardeuse is wearied out—her arm rests on his shoulder heavier than lead—the other dancers one by one drop off.

The lights in the chandeliers one by one die out.

The decorations look pale and shadowy in that dim light which is neither night nor day.

A faint glimmer from the dying lamps, a pale streak of cold grey light from the new-born day, creeping in through half opened shutters.

And by this light the bright-eyed Débardeuse fades sadly. He looks her in the face. How the brightness of her eyes dies out! Again he looks her in the face. How white that face has grown! Again—and now it is the shadow of a face alone that looks in his.

Again—and they are gone—the bright eyes, the face, the shadow of the face. He is alone; alone in that vast saloon.

Alone, and, in the terrible silence, he hears the echoes of his own footsteps in that dismal dance which has no music.

No music but the beating of his breast. For the cold arms are round his neck—they whirl him round, they will not be flung off, or cast away; he can no more escape from their icy grasp than he can escape from death. He looks behind him—there is nothing but himself in the great empty *salle*; but he can feel—cold, deathlike, but O, how palpable!—the long slender fingers, and the ring which was his mother's.

He tries to shout, but he has no power in his burning throat. The silence of the place is only broken by the echoes of his own footsteps in the dance from which he cannot extricate himself. Who says he has no partner? The cold hands are clasped on his breast, and now he does not shun their caress. No! One more polka, if he drops down dead.

The lights are all out, and, half an hour after, the *gendarmes* come in with a lantern to see that the house is empty; they are followed by a

great dog that they have found seated howling on the steps of the theatre. Near the principal entrance they stumble over—

The body of a student, who has died from want of food, exhaustion, and the breaking of a blood-vessel.

Coming Home

by Nina Kiriki Hoffman

I love this house. Except that one closet. I don't think I'll ever, ever leave this house, no matter what happens or who lives here, even though I don't like the closet and it's so close to my room I hate to leave my room because then I have to go past it. I know what happened in that closet, but I don't think about it, or where my brother Matt is. He's been dead longer than I have. I'm still not sure if he's here in the house or not.

My room is the big room at the sunrise side of the upstairs. There's a great big picture window I can see the mountains from, and I love looking at them when the moon slips up behind them, because that's when I'm strongest, in the cool moonlight, not like the mornings when the sun flames across the sky. The sun makes me feel pale. I think that's funny because it used to turn me brown every summer.

This house is like a white wedding cake with a piece cut out in front. The upstairs is smaller and sits on top of the downstairs, and a giant came and cut a piece out of the middle of the downstairs. I think it might have been the piece with the biggest rose. The house is frosted white as a wedding, and upstairs, doors lead out onto the roof so I can pretend to be the bride on top of the cake. Mama called this house adobe. I think it's like living inside a cake with windows.

My best friend Robin, ten, a year older than me, used to live next door in the flat, ordinary house I can see from one of my windows. She liked to come visit, especially after I told her about the cake. She wanted to be a scientist. She said, "Livvie, if I had your brain, I'd put it in a glass bowl and ask it questions all the time."

She didn't say that after Matt was in the closet. Nobody said any-

thing nice to me for a long time after that. We moved away and I never saw Robin again.

After twenty-five years, I was going back to the house I couldn't ever remember calling home, though I lived there with four brothers and my parents the first nine years I was alive. When my husband Scott turned the van onto the private lane that led to the house, I felt as though a lump of ice formed in my chest, as though I were all alone, even with Scott in the driver's seat beside me and the eight kids yelling all around us. Sarah was in my lap and she was as squirmy as a puppy. Dion kept tugging on my braid and saying, "Are we there yet, Mommy? Can I have my own room?" Sterling said he was the oldest and deserved a room of his own if anybody did. Carol said who said Sterling was the oldest? He didn't know his real birthday, did he? Maybe she was older. They had this argument every year when it got too close to June 20th, when we celebrated their birthdays together. The adoption agency had told us they had no birth certificate for Sterling.

Nick yelled for everybody to shut up. He had a deep little voice that reminded me of a frog's croak. He said this was a special moment and Maria wanted it to be nice so shut up. He always spoke up for Maria; she was our newest, only with us seven months, and still shy and quiet. Sometimes I wondered if she really said any of the things Nick credited her with, but it didn't matter; she clung to him and he cared for her, and that was enough. Later, when she settled in, I would ask her how she felt about things.

Prudence said, "Is this it, Mommy? Is this where you lived when you were little?"

I said, "It must be." I felt cold, even though sunlight splashed down on the lush greenery of gardens on both sides of the car. "It must be, but I don't really remember. Except—" I saw a patch of pampas grass in somebody's front yard, and a drive bordered with fuchsia bushes. I felt a shiver ripple up my back. None of this was new. Yet, when I reached for memories, I found only gray fog. My life began at my grandmother's house in San Francisco, almost ten years after I was born.

I thought that was what it was like for our kids. They had lives behind them, mostly in institutions, where they waited for someone to want them; then we adopted them, and their lives really started. I remembered the first time I handed Sterling, our first child, a rolling pin and invited him to flatten out some gingerbread dough so we could cut cookies. He was six, and very solemn. I didn't know how to

talk to him; children seemed like another species to me, a fascinating species I wanted to study, but I didn't know how to approach them. When I handed Sterling the rolling pin, his eyes brightened. When I gave him the raisins for the gingerbread boys' eyes, I remembered my grandmother reaching out to drop precious raisins in my small hand—almost my first-ever memory.

That first contact with Sterling had warmed me, kindling my desire to learn about and love children the way Scott did. Scott spend a lot of his work time doing custody determinations; he was always concerned that the children he worked with stay with the best parent for them.

"What's that?" Artie asked, leaning forward to point past my shoulder, nearly hitting Sarah on the head as he did it.

"A stone pine tree," I said. And how did I know?

It was like a bonsai left by a giant, an enormous twisted tree, standing in the center of the driveway in an elevated circle of ground ringed by stones. There was the big turnaround in front of the houses at the end of the drive. I stared at the white one, a piece of the old Southwest transplanted to this Southern California town, blocky white adobe with vigas poking out here and there, its unlikeliest features its huge windows—in real adobe buildings, the windows were small, the thick walls conserving heat in the winter and cool in the summer. I had studied the Indian cultures of the Southwest in my anthropology courses. The vanished cultures interested me the most.

Scott pulled the van to a stop in front of the white adobe house. The lawn that separated it from the suburban house on the left looked weedy and overgrown. "Who wants to mow the lawn?" Scott asked in his best cheery voice.

"I do!" yelled Nick. Dion chimed in. Sterling laughed. He knows a trick when he hears one.

"Okay, Nick, you and Dion can help me, just as soon as the moving van gets here."

"Honey. Let's get the furniture set up first, okay?" I said. I had never suspected Scott had a passion for yard work. In the rambling house on the edge of town we'd been living in until this house came open, he left the yard to me, and concentrated on keeping the furniture in good repair and the plumbing healthy. I planted the tulip bulbs and coaxed Prudence and Carol into helping me weed. I had wanted to stay there, but Scott kept griping. "Via, you *own* that enormous house, for heaven's sake. How easy is it going to be to find renters? Why don't we just move in? We're one of the few families I know of who could actually use all that space."

I couldn't explain my reluctance. There was something about that

house. . . . Ever since my father's will had been read three years earlier and he left the house to me, I had felt something in some tucked-away corner of my mind. After hearing the clause that left me title to the house, I had looked at my three brothers, strangers to me, angry strangers, who stared back.

Douglas, the oldest, had smiled a terrible smile at me.

Karl's eyes had gone wide. Then he turned his face away from me.

Mark said, "No. He can't mean that." He slumped down, a slender insubstantial thirty-year-old who had never grown up.

"I don't need it," I said. "I'll deed it over to you."

"No, Olivia," said Douglas. "That house belongs to you. Keep it."

Karl shook his head, but he didn't say anything.

Since the house came to me I had let Scott take care of all the maintenance and yard work. I let him deal with the renters. I didn't even want to see the house, and I couldn't tell him why. He accepted it, the same way he accepted my blank-slate childhood: with a kiss, and a "That's all right, Via. I don't have to understand."

"Come on, troops," Scott said now, hopping down out of the van and going around to sling open the sliding door.

"Mommy, I want out," said Sarah, reaching for the door handle. I let her out, then descended to the gravelly drive myself and stood staring at the blank white façade of the house. The children trooped up the brick walkway toward the front courtyard, a cobblestone patio between the wings of the lower story.

"Open it, open it," Carol cried, tugging at the front door.

Scott fished keys out of his pocket and opened the front door. The children pushed past him into the house. My throat closed. I felt dizzy. "Scott, don't let them out of your sight."

"What?" He glanced after them. They went whooping through the house, scattering. "Via. Calm down. I've been through this place with the termite people and there isn't an unsound board in the whole house. It's great."

"Scott," I said, and gripped his arm. "Scott."

He put his arm around me. "What is it, honey?"

"There's a—" I took two staggering steps and I was over the threshold and into the house, Scott supporting me. "Doesn't it smell bad in here?"

"Lysol, maybe. I had professional cleaners in. The last tenants left a mess, but they left a big cleaning deposit too."

"Not that," I said. I eased out of his embrace and strode down the front hallway, toward the western wing.

"The master bedroom's through here," Scott said, pointing down a little hall.

I turned away from him and mounted the stairs. "Nick!" I called. I heard his voice, arguing with Sterling's, above us. "Nick? Where's Artie?"

Carol came to the top of the stairs. "Mom! Guess what? There's a closet up here big enough to be a bedroom!"

I ran up the stairs. "Get out of there!"

I don't like that closet. It's the one place in the house I don't like. I haven't for a long time. Even before it turned into Matt's closet. Before Matt was in the closet, I was in the closet. He locked me in all the time. He was only one year older than me but he was lots bigger. When he was really feeling mean he'd hide the key so the others couldn't let me out, except Doug would hear me screaming in the closet and go get Mama and she had a key that worked too. She always said, "I must get Daddy to take the lock off that door!" but she never did.

I spent a lot of time in that closet. It had all kinds of great games and puzzles and things in it because it was the upstairs playroom closet, and crayons and poster paints and sketch pads. But Matt locked me in and left the light off—the light switch was outside—so I couldn't do anything about it. Once I found crayons and marked all over the walls in the dark because I was just so mad and nobody was home to let me out. Mama gave me Windex and a razor blade and some scrubbing things and made me clean everything off. I cut myself. There were some marks back behind the costumes for dress-up I never did get off, but she didn't look very close.

Matt and I were always fighting. He was mad because I got the big bedroom with its own bathroom. He said that wasn't fair, when he had to share a room with Doug, and Karl and Mark had to share a room too. Mama said it was because I was a girl. Matt said that wasn't fair either. Daddy said nobody ever promised anybody life would be fair.

After Matt was in the closet, nobody would talk to me. It took Daddy and Mama a long time to find a new house. They tried to sell our house but no one would buy it. So we stayed here.

I *do* love this house.

One night I ran down the stairs past Matt's closet and went to Daddy's study. At dinners and at breakfasts everybody looked at me and looked away. Nobody talked. I took a sack lunch to school and ate outside because nobody there would talk to me either. I went to

Daddy and said, "Tell me you love me, Daddy. Please please. Just tell me you love me. Just once."

And he cried, and he said, "Livvie, I know you can't understand this, baby. We're doing the best we can."

Scott held me and said, "What's wrong? What's wrong?"

I said, "Don't let the children go into that closet! Not until you take the door off, Scott. Promise me."

Sterling looked sideways at me. Maria came and hugged my waist. I picked her up and hugged her, burying my face in her clean black hair. "Oh, baby," I whispered, "I love you, I love you."

Scott said, "You kids, you heard your mother. Nobody goes in that closet, all right? I mean it, now."

"But Daddy," said Carol, "there's nothing in there. It's just empty. Except there's some marks on the wall."

I went to the threshold and stared in. Way on the back wall, some faint scribbles in purple crayon—a child's stick figure drawing of a person with a big frown on its face. And lower down, in green, three words: "help help help."

Somebody's been sleeping in my bed.

It's not really my bed. I mean, I can sit on my bed. Most of the time I just walk through all the furniture new people bring into the house, and I can walk through the new people, too. But now there are two girls sleeping in my room, on a bed that's in the same place my bed is. I can see and hear them better than I usually do.

And one of them is having a nightmare.

"Mommy! Mami!"

I heard two voices. Scott stirred in the bed beside me. "Go back to sleep," I murmured, "it's probably just first-night-in-a-new-place jitters."

He mumbled something about first-day jitters and how many jitters could the world possibly hold. I kissed him and got my robe and went upstairs.

Carol and Maria got the big room at the east end of the upstairs. The voices were theirs. I ran up the stairs, looked at the playroom closet—which Scott had nailed shut for me, after I checked it three times to be absolutely certain none of the children was inside—and went to the girls' room.

"Mommy, Maria's having a nightmare," Carol said, sitting up in

her white nightgown. Maria had a grip on Carol's hand, and her eyes were wide and frightened. "She wouldn't let me go get you."

"Mami! A spirit, a spirit!"

"What? What is it, baby?" I sat on the bed beside her and hugged her.

"Is my sister," she whispered. "The little one, oh, pobrecito."

"Maria," I whispered. "You have a sister?"

"Nick said she had a little sister but she died," said Carol.

"The agency didn't tell us. Oh, baby. I'm so sorry." And I thought, no, I was wrong. Their lives don't start when they join our family. Scott talks to them about their pasts. Whenever something like that comes up I turn it over to Scott. He remembers being a child. He knows what it is like to have a past, and how to live with one. "Would you like some warm milk with honey in it?" I asked Maria.

"Mami!" she cried, and pointed past my shoulder.

I looked, and saw a little girl shimmering there, in front of the closet door. Cold terror touched my heart. I hugged Maria tightly, more for my comfort than hers. Carol climbed onto the bed behind me, putting her arms around my shoulders. "Daddy!" she screamed.

"Shh," I said, "shh." And then a song woke in me, a lullaby, not one of Grandma's, though. I sang.

Evening's come, and day is done,
Gone are sing and shout
Time to rest in blanket nest
And blow the candles out.

Down the road to dreams you'll go
There to stay and play
Nothing here but sleeping self
Come to the end of day.

Know I love you when you go
Wherever you may roam
I'll be here to welcome you
When you come back home.

I heard my voice, and thought it wasn't really my voice. It was my mother's voice. I couldn't even remember my mother speaking to me, let alone singing to me. The little shimmering girl crept closer to us. I felt Carol's fingers tighten like talons on my shoulders. "Mama," said the little girl. Her voice sounded like someone talking underwater.

Maria let out a wail and buried her face against my breast.

“Mama,” said the little girl. She reached out and touched my face—

—The little girl vanished.

The three of us sat on the bed and wailed and wailed, clutching at each other. And I remembered. . . .

I colored in my coloring book so carefully, staying inside the lines. Matt took a black crayon and marked across my three favorite pictures. I wanted to put them on my bulletin board. But he wrecked them.

I locked him in the closet.

Matt was in sailing camp with Robin’s brother Tommy and he didn’t want to leave the neighborhood. He was supposed to stay with Robin and Tommy while the rest of us went to visit Gramma in San Francisco. She was sick. I locked Matt in the closet right before we left.

And I forgot.

Matt was supposed to feed our cats while we were gone, even my cat, Little Explorer. They were outside cats and when they didn’t get fed they all ran away.

When we came back from two weeks at Gramma’s there was a smell in the house.

Tommy’s and Robin’s mother saw our big station wagon pull in and she came running across the lawn. “Isn’t Matt with you?” she said. “I tried to call you and ask but I couldn’t remember your mother’s name.” And she looked in the car and Doug and Karl and Mark and I looked back. I thought maybe Matt ran away. He used to talk about running away. So did I. Sometimes at night we snuck out on the roof together and talked about running away. Matt wanted to go to Mexico. He wanted to find an iguana and tame it for a pet. For a minute I thought maybe Matt went to Mexico, but then I remembered . . .

Carol’s face was hot and wet, pressed into the back of my neck. I could feel Maria’s hot tears soaking through my robe and nightgown. I felt a chill in me that even the heat of tears could not banish, as the nine-year-old child inside me began to speak.

Concert to Death

by Paul Ernst

The stage was illuminated brightly, rawly. Every ridge on the ugly steel fire-curtain stood out in the ghostly white radiance.

On the stage were a concert grand piano and a battered piano stool. The top of the piano was down, shutting in the sounding-board. A black drape was thrown over it. A vase of yellow roses was set on the closed, draped lid.

All was in readiness for Lucchesi to enter from the wings, to bow and smile as he walked to the piano, as he had done so many times in his life. Everything was as the master pianist liked it: his favorite, battered old piano stool; piano set in the right-center of a perfectly bare stage; nothing but the raw steel fire-curtain for a backdrop; harsh, uncompromising light.

Only the piano itself was different. For it is not usual for the lid of a concert grand to be down during a performance, nor for the case to be draped and to support a vase of flowers or anything else that might muffle pure clarity of tone.

In the orchestra pit sat the orchestra, instruments tuned and ready, musical scores opened on the racks before each member, tiny lights glimmering like glow-worms over the racks. The orchestra conductor stood before them with arms poised like the wings of a bird about to take off, and with his head back to nod for the opening crash of harmony.

Behind him, in the great auditorium with its thousands of seats, a breathless hush prevailed. In the hush the gradual dimming of the indirect lights overhead had been like a silent dusk over an unrippled lake. In the vast silence just one sound was heard, for an instant—a woman's sobbing.

The conductor's arms swooped down. The opening bar of Lucchesi's *Minuet in G* flooded the huge hall with quivering melody. Every instrument was adding to the tide of music—but the piano. Every musician was playing—but the great Lucchesi himself.

The sobbing sounded again, instantly stifled.

The piece, a short one, drew to its conclusion and silence again held the house. The conductor turned from his rack and faced the thou-

sands of seats. He raised his baton as though to still thunderous applause; which was odd, because there was no applause.

"We will now play Lucchesi's *Dance of the Sprites*," the conductor said. And his voice rang in the auditorium with the hollow boom of a voice in an empty cavern. Rightly so! For there was no one in the vast hall.

The thousands of seats were empty. The boxes, galleries and balconies were empty. On the bare stage was Lucchesi's piano. Yes, but there was no Lucchesi there to play it. There never would be again.

Lucchesi was dead.

"Kind of gets you, doesn't it?" whispered one of the three men in the left wing.

The three were Howard Kent, star reporter for the *Globe*, who was here on sufferance and not for publicity purposes; Milnor Roberts, music critic on the same newspaper; and Isaac Loewenbohn, owner of the auditorium. It was Kent who had spoken.

"Kind of gets you," he repeated, looking across the length of bare stage between the footlights and the fire-curtain.

In the other wing a woman stood alone: a woman dressed in mourning, with a white face standing out against the black like a dainty white cameo. The woman's red underlip was caught between her teeth and her body shook with suppressed sobs.

"It's certainly a unique idea," Kent whispered on. He was afraid that if he didn't talk he would get sloppy, which is no way for a hard-boiled reporter to get. "Staging a Lucchesi concert when Lucchesi is food for worms. Eccentric idea."

"A nice idea, I t'ink," said Loewenbohn, scowling at the reporter. "Today, one year from the day Lucchesi has died, his friends and fellow musicians hold an all-Lucchesi concert in memoriam. That is a nice tribute."

Roberts, the music critic, nodded abstractedly. His mind was full of the piece the orchestra was now playing. *Dance of the Sprites* had been written for a piano lead. There were three long interludes in it when only the piano played—and the piano on the stage had no player before its keyboard!

"Wonder how they'll treat the piano interludes," he whispered to Loewenbohn as the first one drew near. "Will they fill in?"

The auditorium owner shrugged. There was a piano in the pit. Perhaps the orchestra pianist would play Lucchesi's interludes.

But the conductor was more subtle than that.

The three men leaned forward a little as the composition reached

the first interlude and died away in a shower of flute notes. Now it was time for the piano to pick up the thread. Now it was time for Lucchesi to crash in. . . .

Only there was no Lucchesi.

There was silence, while the conductor faced the piano on the stage, with his baton at rest by his side. Silence. The tense, oppressive silence that comes when music is interrupted, but when you know the piece is not yet finished.

In that silence conductor and orchestra stared at the piano on the stage; stared and held their instruments in readiness to play again. There was an eerie matter-of-factness about orchestra and conductor. It was as though of course Lucchesi was seated on the stool; of course he was playing his piano. Death? They were wordlessly refusing it its power. Particularly the conductor. . . .

"Look at him!" muttered the reporter, running his forefinger around under his collar. "Look at him!"

The orchestra leader's body was swaying very slightly. His eyes were wide, mystic, as he stared at the piano—and at the empty stool.

"You'd think Lucchesi really was there, playing!"

The other two paid no attention to him. The critic softly hummed the interlude Lucchesi would be playing if he were alive. Loewenbohn's heavy face seemed less florid than usual.

The critic stopped humming. Even as he did so, the conductor raised his baton and the orchestra went on with the composition, softly, for the piano notes were supposed to sound over the other instruments for a few more bars.

Kent moistened his lips and stared at the keyboard. Curious. For just an instant it had seemed to him that the keys were being rhythmically depressed, as though at the touch of unseen fingers. But that, of course, was imagination.

The piano standing on the bare stage in lonely majesty; the funereal drape over the closed case, and the scent of the yellow roses; the somber dignity with which the orchestra played to an empty auditorium—these things tended to make you see what did not exist.

"Marvelous stuff, that music," Kent said, resolutely keeping the shiver out of his voice.

Roberts nodded. "Lucchesi had supreme genius. It was tragic that he had to die."

"Yeah. And only forty-one. A guy that could turn out stuff like this!"

Roberts smiled.

"Yes, this is superb. But it's not as fine as Lucchesi's last composi-

tion—one he finished just before he died last year. That piece was greatest of all.”

Loewenbohn’s heavy eyebrows went up.

“I don’t t’ink I ever heard of that piece,” he said.

“Few have,” replied Roberts. “And no one ever heard it played. It’s lost.”

“Huh?” said Kent. “But if nobody ever heard it, how do you know it was so great?”

The critic shrugged.

“Lucchesi said it was,” he said simply. “He worked on it for nearly a year, in secret, as he always composed. He finished it. He told me and one or two other close friends about it. He died—and no one has ever been able to find the score.”

Kent shook his head. “That’s tough. And Mrs. Lucchesi is flat broke, too. I did a story on her six months ago. Living with her sister—lost the insurance money—even Lucchesi’s piano in storage. By the way, the piano on the stage is really Lucchesi’s own, isn’t it?”

Roberts looked at the shrouded piano and nodded.

“We got it out of storage for the occasion. Tomorrow”—he looked across at Lucchesi’s widow—“it is to be sold at auction. She has to have money.”

“If only she could find the song!” sympathized Kent.

“It would mean a lot to her,” responded Roberts. “There’s no real wealth in genius. But the song would bring several thousand dollars. And it would bring Lucchesi tremendous posthumous fame.”

He stopped talking. The second piano interlude was near.

The orchestral notes slowed. The conductor and each musician in the pit gazed at the draped piano.

Instinctively the three men in the left wing stared at it too. And in the right wing Lucchesi’s widow swayed forward a little, with her arms going out and her lips parting.

The orchestra stopped playing. Everything was in readiness. All was waiting on Lucchesi, who would play no more. . . .

But as the thick stillness of the interlude continued, Kent, watching the keyboard of Lucchesi’s piano with eyes that were less cynical than usual, began to have an insane idea that perhaps the great composer *was* here at the concert held in his memory.

Surely there was a tall, shadowy figure seated on the old stool. Surely long, steely fingers were flying over the keyboard. Surely a shower of notes was sounding from the instrument that had known for so long the touch of those fingers.

The conductor was again swaying, as though to a cascade of harmony. But now his eyes were wide, almost frightened-looking; and his mouth was a little open and his head was bent as though he dimly heard something not quite audible to others there. The musicians, too, in this second, almost ghastly silence, were not quite the same as they had been in the first interlude. They were rigid in the pit, the lights over their racks reflecting on the whites of their staring eyes and on points of moisture on their tense faces.

Kent drew a deep breath, and glanced at Roberts and Loewenbohn quickly to see if they had heard how shaky his sigh was.

The atmosphere of this memorial concert—this concert to death—had changed. A new element had entered it, somehow. A sort of electricity charged the air. Kent could feel it. He knew the others felt it. He found himself holding his breath, waiting, waiting . . . for what? He did not know.

Once more he tore his eyes from the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano. The keys were *not* moving! How could they, with no fingers to move them?

He saw Lucchesi's widow stagger a little, and started impulsively toward her. She raised her slim hand and waved him back.

The conductor raised his baton. Sweat was glistening on his forehead. He waved his arms, and the musicians, with an obvious effort, swung into the *Dance*.

Kent gulped with relief as the hushed stillness was broken. The strain was lifted a little now; and he took refuge from his inexplicable nervousness by telling himself that this whole thing was a silly farce: getting Loewenbohn to donate the place this afternoon, scraping up an orchestra, dragging Lucchesi's piano from the warehouse—and then acting as though the dead man were here and playing before an accustomed audience! Crazy!

And it was ripping Lucchesi's widow to pieces. He stared across at her and was alarmed by her pallor. They simply shouldn't have permitted this.

She must be terribly broke—forced to put Lucchesi's piano in storage because she had no home of her own to put it in. And it must be the devil for her to have to sell it. It would bring a good price, though. Lucchesi's own piano. . . .

"You say they looked everywhere for that last composition of his?" he whispered to Roberts under cover of the music.

The critic nodded. "Of course. All his effects were gone over." His voice was like Kent's: not quite steady, a little strained. And his eyes, like Kent's, were continually turning toward the keyboard of the fune-

really draped piano. "I helped in the search myself. But he'd hidden it too well."

"Hidden it?" repeated Kent. "Why did he hide it?"

"He thought somebody was trying to steal it. At the very last, he was not a well man. He had delusions. But there were no delusions about his composition. That must have been grand."

The music welling from the musicians in the pit was sublime. No man there had ever played so well before. They were inspired, playing beyond themselves, as though they themselves were but instruments manipulated by a master hand.

The third, and last, piano interlude in *Dance of the Sprites* drew near. The orchestral notes began fading as the piano was supposed to pick up the thread of the composition. Kent scowled.

"I wish they wouldn't *do* this! It's . . . it's . . . damn it, it's ghostly!"

"Shut up," whispered Roberts, his voice thin and brittle.

The last note died away. The great, empty hall swam again in silence. Live, electric silence. Every gaze was riveted on the black-draped piano on the bare stage.

Again the illusion came to Kent, terrifically, that there was a figure on the stool, that long fingers raced over the keyboard in the climactic crash of the interlude. Surely, surely . . .

Roberts started, and stared first at the piano on the stage and then at the piano in the pit. His mouth hung open and his face paled. The great vein in his throat pulsed jerkily.

Kent avoided looking at him. The reporter didn't want to see in the critic's eyes confirmation of something he was telling himself wildly had *not* happened. For he, too, had thought to hear the thing that had sent the blood from Roberts' face: a low, dim note sounding from Lucchesi's piano.

It did not help any to gaze at Loewenbohn and discover that the auditorium owner's face had gone a sickly gray; nor to look from there to the orchestra pit and see that the conductor had dropped his baton and was pressing his fists against the sides of his head while he stared as though in a trance at the piano on the stage.

The interlude was ending. On the score a fountain of notes in upward crescendo culminated in a single note, loud and clear, sustained a moment; then a crescendo to the bass.

Kent gazed at the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano. He didn't want to look at it; he willed his eyes to turn away; but he couldn't look in any other direction. He stared at it, and he saw the keys ripple in an up-

ward sweep. Up and up. A trick of the light! he told himself wildly. A trick of the light!

In the throbbing silence of the empty auditorium a piano note sounded loud and clear.

The three men stared at each other and then, like sleep-walkers, at Lucchesi's piano.

The note faded in the immense stillness . . . faded and was lost.

Lucchesi's widow screamed. She stumbled onto the stage toward the piano, fell, got up again, went on. She collapsed over the piano, cheek to the sable drape, hands clutching at its funereal folds.

"He's *here!*" she screamed. "That note . . . you all heard . . . he's *here!*"

Kent's nails bit into the palms of his hands. Then he caught Roberts' shoulder in a convulsive grip.

"The piano in the pit!" he stuttered. "It was the piano in the pit! Someone in the orchestra sounded it!"

Roberts only wrenched his shoulder free and turned to the woman sobbing over the piano. There was no one near the piano in the pit.

"Here—with us!" cried Lucchesi's widow brokenly. "He came to our anniversary concert! Carlo . . . Carlo! . . ."

"I won't be a fool!" Kent heard his own voice sound out, high and flat. "I won't believe this! I won't!"

But no one paid attention. His voice died away. But the ghostly vibration of the clear high note still seemed to stir the air of the empty hall.

Lucchesi's widow stood erect beside the piano, with her arms spread in supplication toward the empty piano stool.

"Carlo, you are here! You are! Carlo . . . tell me . . . where is the missing score? Where is your last masterpiece?"

The silence hurt the ears as she faced the battered, empty stool, as she called to a man a year dead. Loewenbohn's thick lips were moving soundlessly. The musicians in the pit seemed figures of stone. Roberts and Kent rigidly faced the piano.

"Carlo, tell me," entreated Lucchesi's widow. "Tell me! Please, please, where is the score? Not for me—for you. Your greatest piece. Tell me where it is."

The myriad seats in the auditorium seemed occupied by a vast audience turning ghostly faces toward the stage, uniting with the living folk in wings and pit in staring at the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano.

And the keys—the keys! . . .

They were rippling in a downward sweep, a downward crescendo toward the bass.

"Carlo!" called Lucchesi's widow.

A bass note sounded from Lucchesi's piano—that piano which had no player that mortal eyes could see. A single note, loud and clear. . . .

No, not clear! Loud, it was; but it was cracked, tinny, as if invisible hands were laid on the strings in the closed ebony case.

A thick exclamation tore from Roberts' lips. He stared at the orchestra leader, who stared back at him while comprehension dawned in the eyes of both. Then the music critic started running along the strip of stage to the piano.

Lucchesi's widow was gazing pitifully, tragically, at the battered piano stool.

"Here!" she faltered. "He was here. And he would not answer me . . . would not tell me!"

"But he *has* answered you," Roberts said gently. "He *has*. With that last note. You heard how it sounded. How stupid for no one of us to think to look there before!"

With a trembling hand he took the vase of yellow roses from the top of the concert grand and set it on the floor. He swept the black drape aside and opened the lid—the first time the top had been opened since Lucchesi's death a year ago.

There, on the bass strings where Lucchesi had hastily thrust them, were penciled sheets of music.

The priceless score, Lucchesi's missing masterpiece!

The Considerate Hosts

by Thorp McClusky

Midnight.

It was raining, abysmally. Not the kind of rain in which people sometimes fondly say they like to walk, but rain that was heavy and pitiless, like the rain that fell in France during the war. The road,

unrolling slowly beneath Marvin's headlights, glistened like the flank of a great blacksnake; almost Marvin expected it to writhe out from beneath the wheels of his car. Marvin's small coupé was the only man-made thing that moved through the seething night.

Within the car, however, it was like a snug little cave. Marvin might almost have been in a theater, unconcernedly watching some somber drama in which he could revel without really being touched. His sensation was almost one of creepiness; it was incredible that he could be so close to the rain and still so warm and dry. He hoped devoutly that he would not have a flat tire on a night like this!

Ahead a tiny red pinpoint appeared at the side of the road, grew swiftly, then faded in the car's glare to the bull's-eye of a lantern, swinging in the gloved fist of a big man in a streaming rubber coat. Marvin automatically braked the car and rolled the right-hand window down a little way as he saw the big man come splashing toward him.

"Bridge's washed away," the big man said. "Where you going, Mister?"

"Felders, damn it!"

"You'll have to go around by Little Rock Falls. Take your left up that road. It's a county road, but it's passable. Take your right after you cross Little Rock Falls bridge. It'll bring you into Felders."

Marvin swore. The trooper's face, black behind the ribbons of water dripping from his hat, laughed.

"It's a bad night, Mister."

"Gosh, yes! Isn't it!"

Well, if he must detour, he must detour. What a night to crawl for miles along a rutty back road!

Rutty was no word for it. Every few feet Marvin's car plunged into water-filled holes, gouged out from beneath by the settling of the light roadbed. The sharp, cutting sound of loose stone against the tires was audible even above the hiss of the rain.

Four miles, and Marvin's motor began to sputter and cough. Another mile, and it surrendered entirely. The ignition was soaked; the car would not budge.

Marvin peered through the moisture-streaked windows, and, vaguely, like blacker masses beyond the road, he sensed the presence of thickly clustered trees. The car had stopped in the middle of a little patch of woods. "Judas!" Marvin thought disgustedly. "What a swell place to get stalled!" He switched off the lights to save the battery.

He saw the glimmer then, through the intervening trees, indistinct in the depths of rain.

Where there was a light there was certainly a house, and perhaps a

telephone. Marvin pulled his hat tightly down upon his head, clasped his coat collar up around his ears, got out of the car, pushed the small coupé over on the shoulder of the road, and ran for the light.

The house stood perhaps twenty feet back from the road, and the light shone from a front-room window. As he plowed through the muddy yard—there was no sidewalk—Marvin noticed a second stalled car—a big sedan—standing black and deserted a little way down the road.

The rain was beating him, soaking him to the skin; he pounded on the house door like an impatient sheriff. Almost instantly the door swung open, and Marvin saw a man and a woman standing just inside, in a little hallway that led directly into a well-lighted living-room.

The hallway itself was quite dark. And the man and woman were standing close together, almost as though they might be endeavoring to hide something behind them. But Marvin, wholly preoccupied with his own plight, failed to observe how unusual it must be for these two rural people to be up and about, fully dressed, long after midnight.

Partly shielded from the rain by the little overhang above the door, Marvin took off his dripping hat and urgently explained his plight.

"My car. Won't go. Wires wet, I guess. I wonder if you'd let me use your phone? I might be able to get somebody to come out from Little Rock Falls. I'm sorry that I had to—"

"That's all right," the man said. "Come inside. When you knocked at the door you startled us. We—we really hadn't—well, you know how it is, in the middle of the night and all. But come in."

"We'll have to think this out differently, John," the woman said suddenly.

Think what out differently? thought Marvin absently.

Marvin muttered something about you never can be too careful about strangers, what with so many hold-ups and all. And, oddly, he sensed that in the half darkness the man and woman smiled briefly at each other, as though they shared some secret that made any conception of physical danger to themselves quietly, mildly amusing.

"We weren't thinking of you in that way," the man reassured Marvin. "Come into the living-room."

The living room of that house was—just ordinary. Two overstuffed chairs, a davenport, a bookcase. Nothing particularly modern about the room. Not elaborate, but adequate.

In the brighter light Marvin looked at his hosts. The man was around forty years of age, the woman considerably younger, twenty-eight, or perhaps thirty. And there was something definitely attractive

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about them. It was not their appearance so much, for in appearance they were merely ordinary people; the woman was almost painfully plain. But they moved and talked with a curious singleness of purpose. They reminded Marvin of a pair of gray doves.

Marvin looked around the room until he saw the telephone in a corner, and he noticed with some surprise that it was one of the old-style, coffee-grinder affairs. The man was watching him with peculiar intentness.

"We haven't tried to use the telephone tonight," he told Marvin abruptly, "but I'm afraid it won't work."

"I don't see how it *can* work," the woman added.

Marvin took the receiver off the hook and rotated the little crank. No answer from Central. He tried again, several times, but the line remained dead.

The man nodded his head slowly. "I didn't think it would work," he said, then.

"Wires down or something, I suppose," Marvin hazarded. "Funny thing, I haven't seen one of those old-style phones in years. Didn't think they used 'em any more."

"You're out in the sticks now," the man laughed. He glanced from the window at the almost opaque sheets of rain falling outside.

"You might as well stay here a little while. While you're with us you'll have the illusion, at least, that you're in a comfortable house."

What on earth is he talking about? Marvin asked himself. Is he just a little bit off, maybe? That last sounded like nonsense.

Suddenly the woman spoke.

"He'd better go, John. He can't stay here too long, you know. It would be horrible if someone took his license number and people—jumped to conclusions afterward. No one should know that he stopped here."

The man looked thoughtfully at Marvin.

"Yes, dear, you're right. I hadn't thought that far ahead. I'm afraid, sir, that you'll have to leave," he told Marvin. "Something extremely strange—"

Marvin bristled angrily, and buttoned his coat with an air of affronted dignity.

"I'll go," he said shortly. "I realize perfectly that I'm an intruder. You should not have let me in. After you let me in I began to expect ordinary human courtesy from you. I was mistaken. Good night."

The man stopped him. He seemed very much distressed.

"Just a moment. Don't go until we explain. We have never been considered discourteous before. But tonight—tonight . . .

"I must introduce myself. I am John Reed, and this is my wife, Grace."

He paused significantly, as though that explained everything, but Marvin merely shook his head. "My name's Marvin Phelps, but that's nothing to you. All this talk seems pretty needless."

The man coughed nervously. "Please understand. We're only asking you to go for your own good."

"Oh, sure," Marvin said. "Sure. I understand perfectly. Good night."

The man hesitated. "You see," he said slowly, "things aren't as they seem. We're really ghosts."

"You don't say!"

"My husband is quite right," the woman said loyally. "We've been dead twenty-one years."

"Twenty-two years next October," the man added, after a moment's calculation. "It's a long time."

"Well, I never heard such hooey!" Marvin babbled. "Kindly step away from that door, Mister, and let me out of here before I swing from the heels."

"I know it sounds odd," the man admitted, without moving, "and I hope that you will realize that it's from no choosing of mine that I have to explain. Nevertheless, I was electrocuted, twenty-one years ago, for the murder of the Chairman of the School Board, over in Little Rock Falls. Notice how my head is shaved, and my split trouser-leg? The fact is, that whenever we materialize we have to appear exactly as we were in our last moment of life. It's a restriction on us."

Screwy, certainly screwy. And yet Marvin hazily remembered that School Board affair. Yes, the murderer *had* been a fellow named Reed. The wife had committed suicide a few days after burial of her husband's body.

It was such an odd insanity. Why, they *both* believed it. They even dressed the part. That odd dress the woman was wearing. 'Way out of date. And the man's slit trouser-leg. The screwy cluck had even shaved a little patch on his head, too, and his shirt was open at the throat.

They didn't look dangerous, but you never can tell. Better humor them, and get out of here as quick as I can.

Marvin cleared his throat.

"If I were you—why, say, I'd have lots of fun materializing. I'd be at it every night. Build up a reputation for myself."

The man looked disgusted. "I should kick you out of doors," he

remarked bitterly. "I'm trying to give you a decent explanation, and you keep making fun of me."

"Don't bother with him, John," the wife exclaimed. "It's getting late."

"Mr. Phelps," the self-styled ghost doggedly persisted, ignoring the woman's interruption, "perhaps you noticed a car stalled on the side of the road as you came into our yard. Well, that car, Mr. Phelps, belongs to Lieutenant-Governor Lyons, of Felders, who prosecuted me for that murder and won a conviction, although he knew that I was innocent. Of course he wasn't Lieutenant-Governor then; he was only County Prosecutor. . . .

"That was a political murder, and Lyons knew it. But at that time he still had his way to make in the world—and circumstances pointed toward me. For example, the body of the slain man was found in the ditch just beyond my house. The body had been robbed. The murderer had thrown the victim's pocketbook and watch under our front steps. Lyons said that I had *hidden* them there—though obviously I'd never have done a suicidal thing like that, had I really been the murderer. Lyons knew that, too—but he had to burn somebody.

"What really convicted me was the fact that my contract to teach had not been renewed that spring. It gave Lyons a ready-made motive to pin on me.

"So he framed me. They tried, sentenced, and electrocuted me, all very neatly and legally. Three days after I was buried, my wife committed suicide."

Though Marvin was a trifle afraid, he was nevertheless beginning to enjoy himself. Boy, what a story to tell the gang! If only they'd believe him!

"I can't understand," he pointed out slyly, "how you can be so free with this house if, as you say, you've been dead twenty-one years or so. Don't the present owners or occupants object? If I lived here I certainly wouldn't turn the place over to a couple of ghosts—especially on a night like this!"

The man answered readily, "I told you that things are not as they seem. This house has not been lived in since Grace died. It's not a very modern house, anyway—and people have natural prejudices. At this very moment you are standing in an empty room. Those windows are broken. The wallpaper has peeled away, and half the plaster has fallen off the walls. There is really no light in the house. If things appeared to you as they really are you could not see your hand in front of your face."

Marvin felt in his pocket for his cigarettes. "Well," he said, "you

seem to know all the answers. Have a cigarette. Or don't ghosts smoke?"

The man extended his hand. "Thanks," he replied. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You'll notice that although there are ash-trays about the room there are no cigarettes or tobacco. Grace never smoked, and when they took me to jail she brought all my tobacco there to me. Of course, as I pointed out before, you see this room exactly as it was at the time she killed herself. She's wearing the same dress, for example. There's a certain form about these things, you know."

Marvin lit the cigarettes. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Brother, you certainly seem to think of everything! Though I can't understand, even yet, why you want me to get out of here. I should think that after you've gone to all this trouble, arranging your effects and so on, you'd want somebody to haunt."

The woman laughed dryly.

"Oh, you're not the man we want to haunt, Mr. Phelps. You came along quite by accident; we hadn't counted on you at all. No, Mr. Lyons is the man we're interested in."

"He's out in the hall now," the man said suddenly. He jerked his head toward the door through which Marvin had come. And all at once all this didn't seem half so funny to Marvin as it had seemed a moment before.

"You see," the woman went on quickly, "this house of ours is on a back road. Nobody ever travels this way. We've been trying for years to—to haunt Mr. Lyons, but we've had very little success. He lives in Felders, and we're pitifully weak when we go to Felders. We're strongest when we're in this house, perhaps because we lived here so long.

"But tonight, when the bridge went out, we knew that our opportunity had arrived. We knew that Mr. Lyons was not in Felders, and we knew that he would have to take this detour in order to get home.

"We felt very strongly that Mr. Lyons would be unable to pass this house tonight.

"It turned out as we had hoped. Mr. Lyons had trouble with his car, exactly as you did, and he came straight to this house to ask if he might use the telephone. Perhaps he had forgotten us, years ago—twenty-one years is a long time. Perhaps he was confused by the rain, and didn't know exactly where he was.

"He fainted, Mr. Phelps, the instant he recognized us. We have known for a long time that his heart is weak, and we had hoped that seeing us would frighten him to death, but he is still alive. Of course

while he is unconscious we can do nothing more. Actually, we're almost impalpable. If you weren't so convinced that we are real you could pass your hand right through us.

"We decided to wait until Mr. Lyons regained consciousness and then to frighten him again. We even discussed beating him to death with one of those non-existent chairs you think you see. You understand, his body would be unmarked; he would really die of terror. We were still discussing what to do when you came along.

"We realized at once how embarrassing it might prove for you if Mr. Lyons' body were found in this house tomorrow and the police learned that you were also in the house. That's why we want you to go."

"Well," Marvin said bluntly, "I don't see how I can get my car away from here. It won't run, and if I walk to Little Rock Falls and get somebody to come back here with me the damage'll be done."

"Yes," the man admitted thoughtfully. "It's a problem."

For several minutes they stood like a tableau, without speaking. Marvin was uneasily wondering: Did these people really have old Lyons tied up in the hallway; were they really planning to murder the man? The big car standing out beside the road belonged to *somebody*. . . .

Marvin coughed discreetly.

"Well, it seems to me, my dear shades," he said, "that unless you are perfectly willing to put me into what might turn out to be a very unpleasant position you'll have to let your vengeance ride, for tonight, anyway."

"There'll never be another opportunity like this," the man pointed out. "That bridge won't go again in ten lifetimes."

"We don't want the young man to suffer though, John."

"It seems to me," Marvin suggested, "as though this revenge idea of yours is overdone, anyway. Murdering Lyons won't really do you any good, you know."

"It's the customary thing when a wrong has been done," the man protested.

"Well, maybe," Marvin argued, and all the time he was wondering whether he were really facing a madman who might be dangerous or whether he were at home dreaming in bed; "but I'm not so sure about that. Hauntings are pretty infrequent, you must admit. I'd say that shows that a lot of ghosts really don't care much about the vengeance angle, despite all you say. I think that if you check on it carefully you'll find that a great many ghosts realize that revenge isn't so much. It's really the thinking about revenge, and the planning it, that's all the

fun. Now, for the sake of argument, what good would it do you to put old Lyons away? Why, you'd hardly have any incentive to be ghosts any more. But if you let him go, why, say, any time you wanted to, you could start to scheme up a good scare for him, and begin to calculate how it would work, and time would fly like everything. And on top of all that, if anything happened to me on account of tonight, it would be just too bad for you. *You'd* be haunted, really. It's a bad rule that doesn't work two ways."

The woman looked at her husband. "He's right, John," she said tremulously. "We'd better let Lyons go."

The man nodded. He looked worried.

He spoke very stiffly to Marvin. "I don't agree entirely with all you've said," he pointed out, "but I admit that in order to protect you we'll have to let Lyons go. If you'll give me a hand we'll carry him out and put him in his car."

"Actually, I suppose, I'll be doing all the work."

"Yes," the man agreed, "you will."

They went into the little hall, and there, to Marvin's complete astonishment, crumpled on the floor lay old Lyons. Marvin recognized him easily from the newspaper photographs he had seen.

"Hard-looking duffer, isn't he?" Marvin said, trying to stifle a tremor in his voice.

The man nodded without speaking.

Together, Marvin watching the man narrowly, they carried the lax body out through the rain and put it into the big sedan. When the job was done the man stood silently for a moment, looking up into the black invisible clouds.

"It's clearing," he said matter-of-factly. "In an hour it'll be over."

"My wife'll kill me when I get home," Marvin said.

The man made a little clucking sound. "Maybe if you wiped your ignition now your car'd start. It's had a chance to dry a little."

"I'll try it," Marvin said. He opened the hood and wiped the distributor cap and points and around the spark plugs with his handkerchief. He got in the car and stepped on the starter, and the motor caught almost immediately.

The man stepped toward the door, and Marvin doubled his right fist, ready for anything. But then the man stopped.

"Well, I suppose you'd better be going along," he said. "Good night."

"Good night," Marvin said. "And thanks. I'll stop by one of these days and say hello."

"You wouldn't find us in," the man said simply.

By Heaven, he *is* nuts, Marvin thought. "Listen, brother," he said earnestly, "you aren't going to do anything funny to old Lyons after I'm gone?"

The other shook his head. "No. Don't worry."

Marvin let in the clutch and stepped on the gas. He wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

In Little Rock Falls he went into an all-night lunch and telephoned the police that there was an unconscious man sitting in a car three or four miles back on the detour. Then he drove home.

Early the next morning, on his way to work, he drove back over the detour.

He kept watching for the little house, and when it came in sight he recognized it easily from the contour of the rooms and the spacing of the windows and the little overhang above the door.

But as he came closer he saw that it was deserted. The windows were out, the steps had fallen in. The clapboards were gray and weather-beaten, and naked rafters showed through holes in the roof.

Marvin stopped his car and sat there beside the road for a little while, his face oddly pale. Finally he got out of the car and walked over to the house and went inside.

There was not one single stick of furniture in the rooms. Jagged scars showed in the ceilings where the electric fixtures had been torn away. The house had been wrecked years before by vandals, by neglect, by the merciless wearing of the sun and the rain.

In shape alone were the hallway and living-room as Marvin remembered them. "*There*," he thought, "is where the bookcases were. The table was *there*—the davenport *there*."

Suddenly he stooped, and stared at the dusty boards and underfoot.

On the naked floor lay the butt of a cigarette. And, a half-dozen feet away, lay another cigarette that had not been smoked—that had not even been lighted!

Marvin turned around blindly, and, like an automaton, walked out of that house.

Three days later he read in the newspapers that Lieutenant-Governor Lyons was dead. The Lieutenant-Governor had collapsed, the item continued, while driving his own car home from the state capital the night the Felders bridge was washed out. The death was attributed to heart disease. . . .

After all, Lyons was not a young man.

So Marvin Phelps knew that, even though his considerate ghostly

hosts had voluntarily relinquished their vengeance, blind, impartial nature had meted out justice. And, in a strange way, he felt glad that that was so, glad that Grace and John Reed had left to Fate the punishment they had planned to impose with their own ghostly hands. . . .

Daddy

by Steve Rasnic Tem

Daddy will never let me go.

Daddy said he would come for me; he said Mother couldn't keep me away from him forever. He would be back, with candy and toys, and the two of us would go away to where the forest grew all along the seashore, and there were animals there that talked, and all the lumberjacks smiled at you because they were so happy you wanted to live there too.

I don't understand why Daddy and Mother don't like each other anymore. But they haven't liked each other for a long time. I must have been very small when they liked each other, because they haven't been friends for as long as I can remember. I heard Daddy say one time that Mother hated him, and when I asked him if he hated her too he said he couldn't say. That must mean he does. I wonder sometimes how they could like me, when they hate each other so much.

Daddy's face used to go funny when I asked him about that. But he still didn't answer me.

My Daddy is a woodworker; he makes cabinets and chairs and other wood things, and sometimes wooden toys. Ducks and dogs and chickens you push; their wheels go round and a metal piece on the wheels makes a funny noise. He's given me lots of those. Painted in bright colors: red and blue and yellow and green. Smell so nice. Like pine trees.

Mother told me Daddy wouldn't let her go places, do things and have any fun. He wanted her to stay home with us and do family things all the time. She says a family is important, but you have to have your own life too.

I don't really understand what she means, but she's real serious when she says it.

One day Daddy caught her about to drive away when he told her she couldn't go. He took his gun and shot the front of the car; the radiator made a funny noise. He said now nobody would go anywhere.

A few days after that I heard them yelling at each other and Daddy must have slapped her. That's what it sounded like, and she was crying. Daddy shouldn't do things like that. I stayed in my room and pretended not to hear. And played with my push toys, making the metal squeak as loud as I could.

About a year ago Mother left. A friend picked her up. And then the policeman came out and told Daddy he had to leave Mother alone.

Daddy laughed at the policeman. I never understood why; I didn't hear any joke.

And then Mother and the policeman came out a little while after and got me. I didn't want to go, and Daddy didn't want me to go, but the policeman said I had to. He had a *order*. That means he has to do something.

That's when Daddy said he would come back for me. That Mother couldn't keep me away from him for long. He would never let me go. And he made them take a lot of nice wooden things he had made for me along—a toy chest, a wooden duck and a crow and a rabbit, and a big shiny wood cabinet. They're real pretty, and smell like pine trees.

Mother didn't want to take them at first; but I begged her, and so I got to take them.

I haven't liked it very much with Mother. I don't like her new friend at all. I don't think he's very nice.

Sometimes I dream about Daddy taking me away from here, to live with the lumberjacks in the forest. That would be fun.

I've been in the new house, her friend's house, a long time now.

Mother keeps saying something real bad happened to Daddy. I didn't understand for a very long time what she was saying. She says Daddy had a gun and was pointing it at her friend. And the policeman had to come. Then I know what she means.

She says that my Daddy's dead.

I was sad for a real long time, until I knew that Mother had lied to me. She just didn't want me to see Daddy anymore. But Daddy and me, we're too smart for her and her friend.

See, Daddy visits me sometimes.

Sometimes he doesn't come inside . . . he just looks in my bedroom window to make sure I'm okay. His face is all silvery cause of the moon and the dark and I think it's pretty.

Sometimes when I open my cabinet he's hiding in there, all crumpled up like a pile of clothes, but then he pulls his head out and it's real funny looking so I laugh.

Sometimes he's inside the wooden crow when I push it, and I can hear him laughing over the metal squeaking.

Sometimes he jumps out at me from the toy chest. It scares me at first, but then he hugs me.

He smells so good, just like a pine tree.

And sometimes he whispers to me from my cabinet at night, right after Mother has put me to bed. That's the nicest time. He sounds just like a small wind in the trees, the leaves moving back and forth, but there's words in it.

Mother talks about moving away sometimes, but I know it will never happen. Daddy will never let me go away.

At first those were the only places I saw Daddy: at my window and in the things he gave me. But then I started seeing him everywhere.

In the living room clock, when it strikes six at dinnertime, my Daddy's eyes in the numbers.

In the linen Mother brings back from the laundryroom, piled up in the big red basket. Sometimes I see Daddy's white hands there.

In the bottom of a plate of beets: Daddy's long tongue. In the bushes by the porch: Daddy's head.

A few days ago Mother and her friend decided we were going to move. I knew Daddy wouldn't let them take me away.

Mother and her friend went down into the basement to get some boxes for their things. Then I heard them screaming. Daddy was down there. And they never came back up.

Sometimes I wonder why we haven't gone to live with the lumberjacks, Daddy and me. It would be nice there. But maybe Daddy can't do that now.

Everything smells like pine trees, just like the forest.

Sometimes I wish I could go out and play. But I can't get the door or the windows open. Daddy won't let me. And I haven't eaten in a long time. With all the windows shut the pine tree smell is so strong I feel sick.

I guess Daddy is afraid something might happen to me. So he's decided to watch me real close, take care of me. I see my Daddy's dark eyes and silvery face all over the house: in the wallpaper, in the dark blue rug, crawling across the ceiling. I smell him everywhere. Daddy loves me very much.

Daddy will never let me go.

Dark Mummery

by Thorp McClusky

Until the early spring of 1939 I had never entered a reputedly "haunted" house, nor had I ever met anyone who had done so.

It all came about in rather a rambling sort of way, starting off with twelve or fifteen of us driving down to Phipps' Cove on a Saturday afternoon to spend the weekend with the Bradley Merrills. How long ago that seems now!

I looked forward to a truly delightful weekend; I already knew, or at least was acquainted with, several of the guests—Bob Mansfield, who paints for art's sake but designs fanciful and expensive apartments for the very wealthy for a living; Rebikoff, who has a marionette show; Gladys Sugden, the caustic, hoydenish novelist; and three or four others. Merrill, by the way, was and still is an illustrator.

The afternoon was very casual and delightful; we played a sort of haphazard tennis on the lawn, swam—those of us with Polar Bear instincts—in the freezing surf, and just talked and wandered about. Dinner was at seven, in a high-ceilinged, creamy-white room with a huge black marble fireplace at one end in which a driftwood fire snapped, showering multicolored sparks against the heavy screen. The meal was leisurely; it was already dark outside as we finally assembled in the big, gracious living room for brandies and highballs.

As usual, Bradley and Elsa had prepared no set routine for the evening; Vladimir Lessoff started things off by wandering over to the Chickering and treating us to an impromptu concert. Then Clevedore put on some of his magic, and following Clevedore we danced.

The evening passed swiftly; it was with incredulous surprise that I saw Bradley glance at the tall walnut clock in the hall and dramatically raise his hand.

"In ten seconds, my pious friends and I hope not-too-drunken companions, it will be exactly midnight, Eastern Standard Time."

He had hardly finished speaking when the old clock whirled and rasped, and bonged out twelve slow strokes. We all listened gravely, and immediately the brazen clangor had ceased Gladys Sugden made the inevitable suggestion.

"Ghost story! Who'll tell a ghost story?"

Drily, Bob Mansfield applied the sophisticated squelch. "Why, Gladys! You of all people! We don't have to do anything as tame as that. Not when there's a haunted house right here at the Cove!"

I had heard of that house. A few miles distant along the shore road, it had stood empty for a half century or more. It was popularly supposed to have been built by Jeremiah Phipps, one of New England's more successful privateersmen, or, too frequently, pirates.

Gladys, with just a trifle too much eagerness—so it seemed to me—fell in with the idea. "Perfect! What could be better for Saturday night high jinks? I've always had a sneaking longing to go inside that house. Let's snoop over there tonight. There's a lovely moon . . . !"

Well, we took a vote. The "Ayes" won, of course, overwhelmingly.

I think I suspected trickery from the very start. As a matter of fact, I learned afterward that I was right, and who the ringleaders were—Bradley, Bob Mansfield, and a meek-looking little cartoonist named Gregory. Gladys was in it, too.

My certainty that we were in for some ghostly amateur theatricals was clinched when I noticed, as we were getting ready to leave the house, that Mansfield and Gregory had unobtrusively disappeared. I suspected that they were to be the ghosts of the evening.

We piled into three or four cars and drove the six or seven miles to the Phipps mansion. In the moonlight it looked even more ancient, more forbidding than in daylight, with its gaunt exterior chimneys and its deeply-recessed, many-paned windows. As we swarmed toward its black pile I looked in the shadows cast by the house, by the trees, for Mansfield's car, but there were a hundred pools of inky shadow where a car could be hidden.

Bradley did not have to unlock or force the door; it was unlocked and opened easily. That seemed significant to me. I was surer than ever that some one had gone ahead and was already hidden inside.

When we were all in the hallway, Bradley closed the door behind us with a creaking of ponderous hinges, a rusty click of the wrought iron latch, and turned on a flashlight. He led the way, with an assurance that led me to believe he had been there before, into a large room at the front of the house. I glimpsed briefly a long staircase leading up into the darkness at the end of the hallway; I sensed rather than saw the ornate mouldings surmounting cold, vaultlike spaces, a shrouding of heavy fine dust over everything. But I noticed too that Bradley had been careful to keep the beam of his flashlight turned upward until we were all inside that huge parlor, and I felt sure he had done that to

keep us from noticing the fresh footprints of Mansfield and Gregory in the dust underfoot.

Except for the light from the flashlight, the parlor was almost totally dark. Heavy wooden shutters over the windows permitted no moonlight to enter, except through two or three narrow cracks in the warped panels. The light was too faint to reveal more than the presence and position of the people in the room; certainly it was not strong enough to permit us to identify each other.

"Well, Brad, we're here," Gladys Sugden chirped perkily. "Bring on your ghosts. Or shall we go looking for them? Who's afraid of the big bad ghosts, anyway?"

Bradley parried that one. "This is supposed to be a haunted house, isn't it, Gladys? Can't a ghost appear in this room as well as upstairs or in the cellar? I for one am for staying here and waiting for whatever happens. I don't want any rotten floors collapsing under me. This place isn't any Palace of Mirth."

I suspected he was afraid that we might stumble onto his ghosts before they had a chance to get into their phosphorous paint.

He won his point; he turned off the flashlight—to make it seem more realistic, he said—and we waited.

I don't know just what I expected to happen. I admit the uncertainty of waiting made me feel creepy, and it must have affected the others who did not suspect any funny business much more powerfully. There was unreality in the whole adventure, there was unreality in the shadowy vagueness of our figures, there was unreality in the cold stillness of the long-shuttered room. I caught myself wondering how a bunch of supposedly intelligent adults could act so downright foolish.

Then I began to notice the light. At first, it was just the faintest, vaguest glow, hardly more than a lessening of the total blackness beyond the open hallway door. I seemed to feel the outlines of the hallway growing into visibility without actually seeing them as yet, limned in a sort of purplish absence of complete darkness. That strange light was so vague that it might almost have been imagined.

But the sudden creeping shriveling down my spine was real enough! The others felt it too; I could sense that they were shrinking away from the doorway.

The faint light grew stronger, and tension gripped me with the certainty that something was creeping silently down that staircase into the hall, invisible to me as yet from where I stood.

I acknowledged unwillingly, then, that Bradley was putting on his show with utter artistry. No hollow groans or clanking chains, none of

those too-theatrical effects that defeat their own purpose. It was the very absence of effect that left our imaginations unhampered and built up an eerie apprehension in us. I wondered how Bradley would produce his ghosts without spoiling the effect. Perhaps he didn't intend to actually produce them at all, perhaps he intended to get his effect in some other, less obvious way.

I don't know how long we stood there in that empty room—it may have been several minutes, while no person spoke or changed position, while we strained our eyes trying to see in the light that was hardly less than blackness—the light, I told myself with admiration of my own cleverness, that must be made by the slow uncovering of a stained glass window, letting the moonlight in. Once or twice I heard someone's breathing sharply indrawn, then released in a half-gasp.

Then I saw the figures, standing in the unearthly, purplish gloom.

Again a queer flash of unwilling approbation swept me. Those figures were not skeletoned in phosphorous paint, or anything as crude as that; they were merely vague blotches in human shape, standing silently in the almost non-existent visibility in the hallway.

I have wondered, since, just how few of us did not, at that moment, really believe that they were ghosts!

Gradually, then, in much the same manner as indirect lighting is controlled, the purplish glow began to brighten. With the increase in illumination, I began to feel sure that I recognized those two motionless figures.

The one on the right, tall, slightly stooped, was certainly Mansfield. The dark blotch hiding the lower part of his face was a false beard, those baggy trousers, that hinting of a cutlass at the waist, were all parts of the pirate costume Bradley had considered most appropriate for the occasion. The other fellow, standing to the left and slightly behind Mansfield was Gregory, all right. He'd put a great daub of paint on his breast to simulate blood; he kept his hands folded over it.

The figures neither moved nor spoke. The light was too dim for me to distinguish details of their features, and as it became slightly stronger something of a nervous shock swept over me as I sensed, rather than saw, that their lips were moving, as though they were trying to speak, that their hands were outthrust toward us, as though warning us back. It was an effect, undeniably; Bradley was putting his show over well, after all!

Splitting the silence, a woman screamed, a high-pitched, keening note. In an instant the hypnotic tension that had gripped us all was broken. Bradley cursed and flipped on the flashlight; with a quick rushing of anxious footsteps Gladys Sugden was at the side of the girl, who

was sobbing violently. Bradley's voice boomed out reassuringly, "That's all, that's enough. It's just been a joke, folks. For God's sake, make her understand that it's just a joke, Gladys! A joke that wasn't in very good taste. I'm sorry."

He swung the light on the two figures standing in the doorway.

"All right, Bob, Gregory. Fun's fun, a joke's a joke, enough's enough. Come on in. Break it up."

But the two figures did not move. They still stood there, holding their hands outstretched toward us, their lips moving.

Then Bradley swore, viciously, horribly, without mirth. "You pig-headed fools! Can't you see that you're scaring one of the girls half to death? Get in here and take off that junk!"

Still the figures stood there motionless, tableauesque. I think that we were all beginning to be afraid that they had entered so fully into the spirit of the deception that they were temporarily crazed; even Bradley had no knowledge of what they might do next; what further macabre jest they might have planned was as unknown to him as to us. Curiously, though I was watching them with single-minded attention, I noticed other things too; I noticed with a sort of detached interest that there really was, as I had suspected, a stained glass window high above the staircase, a window which dispelled that unearthly glow over the hallway, now stronger, now weaker as the moon was bright or obscured by clouds.

Almost stealthily, Bradley kept edging forward. He was within six feet of Mansfield, his torch shining blindingly in Mansfield's face. I was only a pace or two behind, and I could see Mansfield's face clearly. There was an uncanny fixity in his gaze that gave me, despite myself, a feeling of discomfort that was very close to horror. The thought came to me abruptly, "Is this damned place really haunted, after all? Have these fellows seen something that drove them out of their minds?"

Bradley cursed again, sharply. The unexpected, brutal sound jarred against my eardrums with the force of an explosion. With the curse Bradley leaped forward. His right hand, furiously outstretched, clutched at Mansfield.

Mansfield and Bradley glided, yes, *glided*, back, swiftly, yet effortlessly. The sudden, relatively violent motion of all three reminded me bizarrely of the quick shifting of scenes thrown on a screen by an old-fashioned magic lantern. Then the tableau was resumed, but now Bradley was standing in the center of the hallway, holding his right hand out before him, looking at it with a strange intentness. Mansfield

and Gregory had halted at the foot of the staircase, their hands still outthrust, thrusting us back.

Bradley spoke like a drunken person.

"Bob? Bob?"

His shoulders hunched, he shuffled doggedly, unsteadily forward, and as he approached Mansfield and Gregory turned and leaped up the staircase, the light from the flashlight shining full on them, on the staircase and the wall above and behind them.

Then that thing happened which is beyond normal human experience. Instantaneously, suddenly as a bolt of lightning, two strangers were also there at the top of the staircase, two sun-swarthed, lithe-muscled men, men with flashing teeth beneath heavy mustaches, with the glint of gold in their ears and the glitter of cutlasses in their hands.

It was like a silent motion picture, running at top speed. There was no sound, only an utter violence of motion. There should have been the thudding of bare feet on the staircase, but I heard no such sound; there should have been the heavy panting of those men and the harsh burst of their curses, but I heard only silence.

Mansfield and Gregory plunged upward to the head of the staircase. Mansfield was slightly in the lead; his right arm swung up in a chopping blow that seemed to go through one of the men as through a mirage; his body, tensed to meet resistance that was not there, spun crazily around and plunged over the low balustrade; I listened for the crash of his fall and heard no sound. I saw Gregory catapult against the other stranger, hurtle through that man in the instant a cutlass flashed, and disappear beyond my range of vision on the staircase landing.

Abruptly, no one was there, no one at all. The head of the staircase gaped down at us, blank, barren, deserted!

I heard Gladys Sugden screaming. She was trying to call Mansfield's name, but the sounds that came from her lips were unrecognizable. My body was trembling violently, and spasms of hot and cold swept over me. I think that horror gripped us all then like a mighty fist, squeezed us until we were incapable of thought, until we could only stand there and feel it engulfing us in beating waves. . . .

I knew then that those two strangers were the ghosts—the true ghosts of old Jeremiah Phipps' mansion!

What, in the Name of the Almighty, had we just seen re-enacted? The experience through which Mansfield and Gregory had passed early in the evening—an experience so mind-shattering that it had driven them mad?

Where were they?

"Bradley!" My voice was a whispered rattle. "Where are they? Mansfield and Gregory? Where are they?"

Bradley looked at me, his eyes enormous, his lips trembling.

"Where are they?" he repeated slowly. He moved his hands in an odd, uncontrolled way, helplessly.

While he stared at me, I took the flashlight from him. Somehow, I started up the staircase, and Bradley followed.

At the top, on the landing where, like uplifted arms, narrower flights continued upward into the gloom, we halted.

There, beneath the stained glass window, huddled far back against the wall and hidden from view from below by the pitch of the staircase, lay the twisted body of a man, fallen as if death had come as he had catapulted across the landing from the staircase below.

Bradley moaned, and I felt the balustrade shudder as he sagged heavily against it. I was trembling, uncontrollably.

The body was the body of Gregory!

Somehow we found the courage, after a moment, to look down. With photographic clarity our eyes saw, and our numbed minds recorded automatically, the staring horror in Gregory's wide-open, glazing eyes, the smear of crimson paint over his heart.

Without speaking, we turned away and staggered down that staircase. As though urged by a Fate beyond human capacity to resist, I turned the flashlight beam into the dark recess behind the staircase, beneath the balustrade across which Mansfield had seemed to plunge.

Without surprise I saw that Mansfield's body was there, spreadeagled as though he had put out his arms to break the fall, crushed against the naked floor, his neck broken.

I remember little of what else happened that night. I do not know if among us there were hysterical outbursts or a more terrible, controlled silence. I do not remember how or when we left that house. Memory grows clearer with the next day, with the beginnings of the grinding police investigation, the certainty with which the police believed that we had trumped up a fantastic story to cover a double murder in our "fast set," the newspaper headlines.

It was a long time before that night in the old Phipps house was forgotten by the public. But it was forgotten at last, and for years it remained as no more than an area of nightmare in the recesses of my memory, until last summer, when the old house was finally torn down, to save taxes, somebody told me.

About that time I chanced to meet Bradley in town one day. He

looked more distinguished than ever, with his prematurely white hair, and he looked at my graying temples with wry understanding.

"They're either too young or too old." He softly sang a phrase from the hit song and made a quick, angry gesture with his right hand. "We're too old, and that's that. How about lunch?"

In the quiet, around the corner off the Avenue restaurant to which he took me, he told me those things which drew all the threads together, wrote "Finis" to the story of Phipps' mansion.

"I couldn't stay away—after they started to raze that house," he said slowly, quietly. "I went down there almost every day; I knew that they would find something—call it premonition, intuition, what you will. . . .

"I knew that they would find something, some explanation, in that staircase. I watched them take up the flooring on that landing, rip up the rubble, the stone and mortar, beneath. . . .

"That house was built to endure. Old Phipps, when he built it, was ready to settle down, all right.

"But first he had to get rid of his past. He must have had a couple of his men who wanted to stay on shore with him, even though he'd split his bloody plunder with them, with his crew. But old Phipps knew that those two fellows we saw at the top of that staircase weren't the kind he wanted around him in his respectability.

"This must have been what happened. When the masons had just about finished filling in that staircase, old Phipps just bashed in the heads of those two sailors of his and dumped the bodies in the mortar and covered them up. They found the skeletons just the other day, you know."

I picked up my coffee, put it down again.

"I read in the paper about the gold earrings and the cutlasses they dug up with those skeletons," I said.

Bradley looked at me thoughtfully. "Funny about those cutlasses. Remember that Gregory's body was unmarked, and that he died of heart failure?"

I picked up my cup again; once again I put it down.

"Gregory—Mansfield," I whispered. "What a horrible way to die! Think of it; they went up that staircase the second time, after they had already seen the ghosts! That was a re-enactment, wasn't it, Bradley? We could have saved them then; they were crazy with fear, but not crazy enough not to try to yarn us. We should have knocked them down, tied them up—anything—only we should have saved them somehow."

Slowly Bradley shook his head. A curious, faraway look—the look of one who gazed into the depths of the infinite—came into his eyes.

“No, my friend. We couldn’t have saved them. It was too late for that. For they were already dead when we saw them in that—yes, it *was* a re-enactment. They were dead before we entered the house. We saw, not two, but *four* ghosts that night. When I tried to grasp Mansfield, there in that hallway, my hand went through him as though through a nothingness—a nothingness that was cold and empty and terrible as the black dead space beyond the farthest stars!”

Dave in the City Room

by Talbot Johns

He stood on the door-sill of the old Globe city room and looked around. The place seemed about the same, though after a year’s absence he seemed to see it differently—sort of all at once instead of item by item. There was a new and shiny teletype clicking monotonously in the corner, but the faded yellow bulbs with their green metal shades hanging from the ceiling still cut triangles through a perpetual haze of blue smoke. Cigarette-charred desks, crumpled wads of yellow copy-paper and the old crack in the ceiling that the owners had never fixed because the plaster had fallen on Bart Davis’ head and he’d been killed the next day on a fire story—the old-looking boy in the doorway took them all in with a glance and turned to Clem, sitting at the night desk.

“Hello, Reggie,” said Clem.

“It’s been a long time,” said Reggie.

“It has, at that,” said Clem.

That was all, for a minute. It was enough, Reggie thought. Things would begin to iron themselves out in a while. No use trying to rush them.

The smoke from his cigarette curled under a lampshade and shot out in a little swirl as it hit the hot bulb. Red Mackenzie, of the twelve-

to-eight shift, slouched into the city room, cursing softly because he was a couple of minutes late.

He almost collided with Reggie, but didn't give him a glance. I suppose that's what happens, thought Reggie, when you've been away as long as I have. He didn't have to look right through me, though.

"It's just a year to the day, isn't it?" said Clem, drumming noiselessly on the night desk with his big knuckles.

"That's right," said Reggie, "just a year."

"I was wondering if you'd come," said Clem.

"You knew very well I would," said Reggie. "I told you, didn't I?"

Funny thing, but it was getting colder. Red was on the phone now, getting a stick from AP on some wedding in Baltimore, and had his coat off, despite the chill. Reggie wanted to speak to Red, but decided not to. Red was a good enough guy, but probably wouldn't understand. Clem—good old fat Clem, with his thinning gray hair and his forty-year jowls—was leaning back in his chair, staring at Bart Davis' hole in the ceiling, his thumbs linked in the arm holes of his vest as Reggie had seen them for years when he worked on the night staff. "One of Clem's boys," they used to call Reggie in the old days. One of the boys who would go through a herd of wildcats and a hundred cops to get any story that Clem wanted—until a year ago.

"We were fools, Reggie," said Clem.

"I'll say," replied Reggie.

"We should never have let her jam our lives up that way," said Clem.

"Women are poison to good newspapermen," said Reggie.

Now it was coming out, and he was glad of it. He'd worried about this for a year, and here it was, staring him right in the face. Three hundred and sixty-five nights of thinking about Clem, to whom he should have been loyal—of the girl, who knew no loyalty to anything, and of himself, too. All added up, they made this moment, right now, face to face with Clem and the whole thing ready to blow off.

All Clem said was, "We should have found some other way out of it."

"You know I felt that way, too, at the last minute," said Reggie, "when it was too late."

"Yes," said Clem, "I know."

Reggie had known that Clem would be like this, because Clem always understood. His heart warmed up in spite of his chill. He was glad he'd come—glad he'd kept this crazy date, made a year ago when neither of them thought it could be kept. No matter how hard it was, these things ought to be talked out, he thought. No matter what

happened or what they'd done a year ago, he and Clem were still as close as any two men could be. Sometimes, during the past year, he'd wondered if they *would* be men when they met tonight. People can stand just so much and no more. Clem seemed the same, though. Probably he did, too.

Time seemed to race through his brain as he stood there, six feet of curly-topped reporter, gray slouch hat on the back of his head. Time was a funny thing. For a year it had dragged until he almost went insane, waiting to come and see Clem as they'd planned it. Now, here he was and there was no time, really—just he and Clem, and Red on the phone, still getting the paragraph from Baltimore and paying no attention to either of them. No minutes or seconds in this moment—just he, Reggie, waiting for Clem, his friend, to say something.

"It wasn't really your fault, Reggie," said Clem. "She was a wild one and I was sort of a fool. None like an old one, they tell me." He laughed, and startled Reggie, because it wasn't like one of Clem's old rollicking bellows that used to clear the wires as far as Chicago. It was just a little, thin, sardonic laugh, like the wind whispering in a tenement fire-escape.

"Don't blame her too much," said Reggie. "A couple of years before she met you she and I were pretty thick. Came a time when I couldn't forget it, and neither could she."

His words seemed to come to his ears from very far away, and sounded short and clipped. How else should they sound? he wondered. He was tired. The constant clacking of the teletype got on his nerves, and he seemed unable to hold his thoughts together as well as he used to. He wandered over to the teletype to see what all the racket was about, and pulled a yard of paper out of the basket. "Famous Movie Actress Gets Fourth Divorce; Senator Promises Lower Taxes If; Orange, N. J., Bride and Groom Killed in Triple Crash. . . ." A dream world, he thought—he and Clem had the only reality—he and Clem and their problem.

". . . And I was too old, anyway. Must have been crazy." Reggie realized that Clem was still talking. Funny—they must have gotten out of tune for a minute. "You two kids—I loved you both. Should have just backed out of the whole thing. But I had to go and marry her, and try to set up housekeeping. Me, Clem Roberts, whose home is right behind this desk and always has been! Thank the Lord there were no kids. What's she doing now, Reggie?"

"I don't know," said Reggie. What did he care what she was doing?

"Don't care, either, hey kid?" Clem was more like himself now, but a little pale still. "Neither do I. It's you and me from now on!"

There it was. That was what Reggie had been waiting for. Now that he had it, now that he knew that he and Clem were as they always had been, what of it? What was left for them now? He felt tired again. Let Clem figure it out.

"You figure it out, Clem," he said. "Where do we go from here?"

"Now you're talking sense, boy," said Clem. "I don't see any reason why we can't go on as usual, and pick up right where we left off. Things are going to be different—don't kid yourself on that—because we're different. We have to be, after"—he made a funny, quick motion with his hand—"all that. But we're still pals, we've got more sense than we used to have, and that's that."

They used to call him, the boys that didn't like him—and there were plenty who didn't, though they slaved for him—"That's That" Roberts.

Clem pulled his big antique watch out of his vest pocket, looked at it and started to pull on his coat. Then he reached for the phone.

"Shoot me up a morning final!" he barked in a voice that didn't sound like his at all. Red Mackenzie, batting out the Baltimore story on his typewriter, looked around suddenly as if he'd heard Clem for the first time, and then turned back to his pecking with a puzzled look on his face.

A boy brought the paper in, tossed it on the desk, and ran out again without saying a word. Reggie leaned over with his fists on the desk top, and watched Clem turn to page three.

"You didn't make front page, Reggie," said Clem. "Bad luck to the end."

"O. K. with me," said Reggie. He leaned over further to see the half-column story, and his coat sleeve slipped up on his arm.

"Bad burn you have there," said Clem.

"Doesn't hurt now," said Reggie, and they read the story together.

PAYS WITH LIFE FOR CRIME ON MURDER ANNIVERSARY

Ossining, N. Y., July 26: At two minutes past midnight tonight Reginald J. Fallon, New York Globe reporter, went calmly to the electric chair for the murder by shooting a year ago today of his city editor, Clement J. Roberts of White Plains, N. Y. Witnesses marveled at the composure of the condemned man, who seemed to welcome . . .

"That's that," said Clem. "Let's go."

They walked out of the city room arm in arm, and the clock said quarter after twelve.

A Dead Secret

by Lafcadio Hearn

A long time ago, in the province of Tamba, there lived a rich merchant named Inamuraya Gensuké. He had a daughter called O-Sono. As she was very clever and pretty, he thought it would be a pity to let her grow up with only such teaching as the country-teachers could give her: so he sent her, in care of some trusty attendants, to Kyôto, that she might be trained in the polite accomplishments taught to the ladies of the capital. After she had thus been educated, she was married to a friend of her father's family—a merchant named Nagaraya—and she lived happily with him for nearly four years. They had one child—a boy. But O-Sono fell ill and died in the fourth year after her marriage.

On the night after the funeral of O-Sono, her little son said that his mamma had come back, and was in the room upstairs. She had smiled at him, but would not talk to him: so he became afraid, and ran away. Then some of the family went upstairs to the room which had been O-Sono's; and they were startled to see, by the light of a small lamp which had been kindled before a shrine in that room, the figure of the dead mother. She appeared as if standing in front of a *tansu*, or chest of drawers, that still contained her ornaments and her wearing-apparel. Her head and shoulders could be very distinctly seen; but from the waist downward the figure thinned into invisibility—and it was like an imperfect reflection of her, and transparent as a shadow on water.

Then the folk were afraid, and left the room. Below they consulted together; and the mother of O-Sono's husband said: "A woman is fond of her small things; and O-Sono was much attached to her belongings. Perhaps she has come back to look at them. Many dead persons will do that—unless the things be given to the parish-temple.

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If we present O-Sono's robes and girdles to the temple, her spirit will probably find rest."

It was agreed that this should be done as soon as possible. So on the following morning the drawers were emptied; and all of O-Sono's ornaments and dresses were taken to the temple. But she came back the next night, and looked at the *tansu* as before. And she came back also on the night following, and the night after that, and every night—and the house became a house of fear.

The mother of O-Sono's husband then went to the parish-temple, and told the chief priest all that had happened, and asked for ghostly counsel. The temple was a Zen temple; and the head-priest was a learned old man, known as Daigen Oshō. He said: "There must be something about which she is anxious, in or near that *tansu*." "But we emptied all the drawers," replied the old woman; "there is nothing in the *tansu*." "Well," said Daigen Oshō, "to-night I shall go to your house, and keep watch in that room, and see what can be done. You must give orders that no person shall enter the room while I am watching, unless I call."

After sundown, Daigen-Oshō went to the house, and found the room made ready for him. He remained there alone, reading the sūtras; and nothing appeared until after the Hour of the Rat. Then the figure of O-Sono outlined itself in front of the *tansu*. Her face had a wistful look; and she kept her eyes fixed upon the *tansu*.

The priest uttered the holy formula prescribed in such cases, and then, addressing the figure by the *kaimyo* of O-Sono, said: "I have come here in order to help you. Perhaps in that *tansu* there is something about which you have reason to feel anxious. Shall I try to find it for you?" The shadow appeared to give assent by a slight motion of the head; and the priest, rising, opened the top drawer. It was empty. Successively he opened the second, the third, and the fourth drawer; he searched carefully behind them and beneath them; he carefully examined the interior of the chest. He found nothing. But the figure remained gazing as wistfully as before. "What can she want?" thought the priest. Suddenly it occurred to him that there might be something hidden under the paper with which the drawers were lined. He removed the lining of the first drawer:—nothing! He removed the lining of the second and third drawers:—still nothing. But under the lining of the lowermost drawer he found—a letter. "Is this the thing about which you have been troubled?" he asked. The shadow of the woman turned toward him,—her faint gaze fixed upon the letter. "Shall I burn

it for you?" he asked. She bowed before him. "It shall be burned in the temple this very morning," he promised—"and no one shall read it, except myself." The figure smiled and vanished.

Dawn was breaking as the priest descended the stairs, to find the family waiting anxiously below. "Do not be anxious," he said to them: "she will not appear again." And she never did.

The letter was burned. It was a love-letter written to O-Sono in the time of her studies at Kyōto. But the priest alone knew what was in it; and the secret died with him.

The Door

by Henry S. Whitehead

Those in the motor car hardly felt the slight, though sickening impact. It was rather, indeed, because of the instinct for something-gone-wrong, than because of conviction that he had struck anything more important than a roll of tangled burlap from some passing moving van, that the driver brought his heavy car to a stop with a grinding of brakes strenuously applied, and went back to see what he had struck.

He had turned the corner almost incidentally; but when he alighted and went back, when the thin gleam of his flashlight revealed to him the heap of huddled pulp which lay there, the driver realized in the throes of a hideous nausea what it was his heavy machine had spurned and crushed

Roger Phillips, intent upon the first really decent act of his whole life, hardly noticed what was forward. He had been crossing the street. He continued to be intent on his own concerns. Interrupted only by a kind of cold shudder to which he gave only passing thought as if with the very outer edge of his mind, he did not stop, but crossed the sidewalk, looking up as he had done many times before to reassure himself that the lights were out in the living-room of the apartment up there on the third floor of the apartment house.

They were out, as he had confidently anticipated, and, reassured, he quickly mounted the steps to the front entrance. Some one came out, hurriedly, and passed him as he entered, the rush taking him by surprise. He turned his head as quickly as he could, to avoid recognition. It was old Mr. Osler, his father's neighbor, who had rushed out. The elderly man was in his shirt sleeves, and appeared greatly agitated, so much so that young Phillips was certain he had not been recognized, hardly even noticed, indeed. He breathed an audible sigh of relief. He did not want old Osler to mention this chance meeting to his father the next time he should see him, and he knew Osler to be garrulous.

The young man mounted lightly and hurriedly the two flights of steps that led to the door of his father's apartment. He thrust his key into the patent lock of the apartment door confidently, almost without thought—a mechanical motion. As mechanically, he turned the key to the right. It was an old key, and it fitted the keyhole easily. He knew that his father and mother were at the symphony concert. They had not missed one for years during the season for symphony concerts, and this was their regular night. He had chosen this night for that reason. He knew the colored maid was out, too. He had seen her, not five minutes earlier, getting on a car for Boston. "The coast," as he phrased the thought to himself, somewhat melodramatically, "was clear!" He was certain of security from interruption. Only let him get safely into the apartment, do what he had to do, and as quietly and unobtrusively depart, and he would be satisfied, quite satisfied.

But the lock offered unexpected resistance. It was inexplicable, irritating. His overtensed nerves revolted abruptly at this check. The key had slipped into the slot, as always, without difficulty—but it would not turn! Furiously he twisted it this way and that. At last he removed it and stared at it curiously. There was nothing amiss with the key. Could his father have had the lock changed?

Anger and quick shame smote him, suddenly. He looked closely at the lock. No, it was unchanged. There were the numberless tiny scratchmarks of innumerable insertions. It was the same.

Gingerly, carefully, he inserted the key again. He turned it to the right. Of course it turned to the right; he remembered that clearly. He had so turned it countless times.

It would not move. He put out all his puny strength, and still it would not turn. Hot exasperation shook him.

As he swore under his breath in his irritation at this bar to the fulfillment of his purpose, he became for the first time conscious of a rising commotion in the street below, and he paused, irresolutely, and listened, his nerves suddenly strung taut. Many voices seemed to be

mingled in the excited hum that came to his ears. Bits of phrases, even, could be distinguished. Something had happened down there, it seemed. As he listened, the commotion of spoken sound resolved itself into a tone which, upon his subconscious effort to analyze it, seemed to him to express horror and commiseration, with an overtone of fear. The fear communicated itself to him. He shook, as the voice of the growing throng, a blended, corporate voice, came up to him in sickening waves of apprehension.

What if this should mean an interruption? Impatiently wrenching himself away from his preoccupation and back to his more immediate concern with the door, he thrust the key into the lock a third time, this time aggressively, violently. Again he tried to snap the lock. Again it resisted him, unaccountably, devilishly, as it seemed to him.

Then, in his pause of desperation, he thought he heard his own name spoken. He could feel his face go white, the roots of his hair prickle. He listened, intently, crouching catlike there on the empty landing before the door of his father's apartment, and as he listened, every nerve intent, he heard the entrance-door below flung open, and the corporate voice of the throng outside, hitherto muffled and faint, came to him suddenly in a wave of sound, jumbled and obscure as a whole, but with certain strident voices strangely clear and distinct.

A shuffle of heavy feet came to his ears, as if several persons were entering the lower hallway, their footsteps falling heavily on the tiled flooring. They would be coming upstairs!

He shrank back against the door—that devilish door! If only he could get it open!

Something like this, he told himself, in a wave of self-pity that swept him—something like this, unexpected, unforeseen, unreasonable—something like this was always happening to him!

That door! It was an epitome of his futile, worthless life! That had happened to him, just the same kind of thing, a month ago when he had been turned out of his home. The events of the intervening weeks rushed, galloping, through his overtensed mind. And now, as ever since that debacle, there was present with him a kind of unforgettable vision of his mother—his poor mother, her face covered with the tears which she made no effort to wipe away—his poor mother, looking at him, stricken, through those tears which blurred her face: and there was his father, the kindly face set now in a stern mask, pale and with deep lines—his father telling him that this was the end. There would be no public prosecution. Was he not their son? But he must go now! His home would be no longer his home . . .

He recalled the dazed days that followed: the mechanical activities

of his daily employment; his search, half-hearted, for a furnished room. He recalled, shuddering, the several times when, moved by the mechanism of long-established usage, he had nearly taken an Allston car for "home," which was to be no longer his home . . .

He had not sent back the key. He could not tell why he had kept it. He had forgotten to hand it back to his father when he had left, and his father, doubtless unthinkingly, had not suggested its return. That was why he still had it, and here he stood, now, on the very threshold of that place which had been "home" to him for so many years, about to make the restitution that would do something to remove the saddest of all the blots on his conscience—and he could not get in!

The men, talking with hushed voices, had reached the first landing. Young Phillips, caught by a sudden gust of abject terror, shrank against the stubborn door, the door which, unaccountably, he could not open. Then, his mind readjusting itself, he remembered that he had no reason for concealment, for fear. Even though he might be seen here, even though these people should be coming all the way up the stairs, it could not matter. Let him be seen: what of it? He was supposed to live here, of course. It was only a short time since he had actually ceased to live here, and his father had said nothing. No public charge had been made against him. How one's conscience could make one a coward!

Under the invigorating stress of this reaction, he straightened himself, stood up boldly. Realizing that it might appear odd for him to be discovered standing here aimlessly on the landing, he started to go downstairs. But by now the narrow staircase was completely blocked by the ascending group. He stopped, halfway from that flight. The men were carrying something, something heavy, and of considerable bulk, it would seem. He could not see clearly in that dim light just what it was. He stopped, half-way down, but none of the men carrying the awkward bundle, covered with what looked like an automobile curtain, looked up, nor appeared to notice him. Neither did the straggling group of men, and a woman or two, who were following them.

Fascinated, he gazed at what they were carrying. As they approached and took the turn in the stairs, so that the electric light on the upper landing shone more directly upon it, he looked closer. It was the body of a man! It hung, limp and ungainly in their somewhat awkward grasp as they shouldered up toward him.

Something about it seemed vaguely familiar, the details presenting themselves to his fascinated gaze in rapid succession: the trouser-ends, the shoes . . .

★ ★ ★

The men turned the last corner in the winding stairway and came into full view. As they turned the corner, the leather curtain slipped and the face of the dead man was for a moment exposed to view. Roger Phillips looked at it, fascinated, horrified. Then one of the men, halting for an instant, drew the corner of the curtain over the face again, and he could no longer see it. The head rolled. The broken body had been grievously crushed.

Roger Phillips, utterly distraught, cowered, a limp heap, against the unyielding door of his father's apartment. He had looked for one horrific instant into his own distorted, dead face!

The men, breathing hard, reached the landing. One of them, gingerly shifting his portion of the burden upon the shoulder of another, stepped forward to ring the bell of the Phillips apartment. No one answered the ring, and the man rang again, impatiently, insistently. The bell trilled inside the empty apartment. The men stood, silently, shifting uneasily from one foot to another. Behind them, a thin mutter came from the waiting stragglers who had followed them, moved by an inordinate curiosity.

"Here's a key sticking in the door," said the man who had rung the bell. "Guess we'd be all right if we opened the door and took the young fellow in. There doesn't seem to be anyone home."

A murmur of assent came from the other men.

He turned the key to the left, then to the right, and the door opened. They carried the broken body inside and carefully laid it out on the sofa in the living-room.

Drowned Argosies

by Jay Wilmer Benjamin

The *Volcania* had gone down. This much Charteris knew. It was all he felt he could possibly lay claim to knowing. Drifting five days in an open boat in the Carribbean Sea is not conducive to sanity.

Not that Charteris was going mad. Far from it. But he couldn't understand the ghastly people who seemed to be trying to talk to him.

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They were sailormen. He knew it. But what a peculiar crew! There were half-naked galley slaves with the great calluses still on their palms. There were old shellbacks, barefoot, and naked above the waist. There were men who had driven the great clipper ships from Canton to London in sixty days. And there were men like Charteris, who knew the intricacies of the great liners' guts.

They were trying to talk to him—then Charteris shook his head.

"Dead men can't talk!"

The sun beat down. The brazen sea reflected it. Water—*water*—WATER! That was Charteris' sole thought.

Finally one old shellback, whose gaunt figure betokened great strength and greater endurance, beckoned him, and Charteris heard: "I say, maty—don't worry. Who do you want to sign on with?"

"What do you mean?" asked Charteris. "You can't—"

The old shellback laughed, and Charteris shuddered. It is odd to hear ghosts laugh, and Charteris knew these were ghosts. Where else could men have come from in all that dying sea?

"Think we're dead, don't you?" said the shellback. "Well, we ain't! Only time a sailor dies is when they plant him six feet under in a churchyard. There's men here who served in every kind of craft, from a bireme to a liner."

"Who are you?" asked Charteris.

"Me? Why, bless you, I sailed with Paul Jones on the *Ranger*. A good cap'n, that, only a bit of a driver."

"*Paul Jones*? Why, man, he's dead nearly two hundred years!"

"Not quite that," said the old shellback, and laughed.

"Ugh!" thought Charteris, "I *must* be going mad."

"Not quite that," said the old shellback again. "Now you take Petrus here"—and he waved a hand toward a squat hairy half-naked man—"he sailed with Quintus Maximum when they stripped the Mediterranean of the Carthaginian boats."

Petrus grinned and gabbled something. The old shellback translated. "He says it was a hell of a good fight, and you should have seen 'em scatter when the biremes came."

"What? Served under Quintus Maximus? Why, man, that's nineteen hundred years ago!"

"Nigher two thousand—but what's time, what's time?"

And he spat.

That, thought Charteris, was the ragged limit. He must be mad.

There was silence once more until Charteris leaned his head against a thwart and began to cry, in long, racking sobs. The shellback reached over, and Charteris shivered at the touch of his hand. It was icy cold, in

spite of the brazen sun still sending its red-hot rays to beat on Charteris' back.

"I felt that way when they left me to drift, too. You know, I was the man they lost from the *Ranger*. But hell—here's Hendrik Hudson. Want to talk to *him* about driftin'?"

"No," said Charteris, "no—no—no—no—no—no—no—"

A voice broke in, a deep voice vibrant with sympathy.

"Poor youngster! They all feel that way just before they sign on. Myself, I felt it too."

"Who are you?" Charteris asked wildly.

"Hendrik Hudson, cap'n of the *Half-Moon*."

"What are you doing here?"

"I signed on to sail under Admiral Beresford. I command the *Saturnia*. Do you want to sign on with me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Young fool! Do you not know that we who sailed the seven seas still sail beneath her bosom? Look!"—and he stabbed a thick fat finger at the green waves.

Weakly Charteris crawled to the gunwale and looked. Down below he saw a tall clipper ship sailing serenely. Her sails were gone, and in their places were long streamers of kelp. From truck to keelson she was wreathed with flying seaweed, but about her decks moved sailormen going to and fro quite as if it were their normal life. Muffled by sixty fathoms of water, he heard the strokes of a ship's bell and a dim voice: "*Three bells! Relieve the wheel and lookout.*"

"But I know nothing about sailing-ships, Cap'n. I'm an engineer."

"So? Nat!" And Hendrik Hudson turned to the old shellback. "Does Cap'n Lucks need an engineer?"

"Depends, Cap'n. I hear he needed a man with an extra first's certificate."

"Call him up, will you?"

And Charteris' eyes bulged as he saw the sailor, Nat, produce a bosun's whistle and blow an odd piping call.

The sea boiled, and up rose a man dressed even as Charteris' old captain. The four gold stripes of a master mariner shone as they had in the days when Captain Lucks had proudly trod the deck of the *Titan*.

"Hello. What's up?" he boomed.

And Charteris noticed that there was a slight hiss to the S's, as though the captain had false teeth.

"This man, Cap'n," said Nat, respectfully pulling his forelock, "is gonna sign on with you."

“Hmm. What can he do?”

“I’m an extra first, sir,” said Charteris, convinced by now that all this was more than just a dream, that it was indeed actually life.

Dimly on the horizon rose a faint smudge of smoke as a long, lean coast-guard cutter drove its knife-like prow through the waters, searching for survivors of the *Volcania*. On the bridge a tense officer quartered the sea with terrible efficiency.

“God!” he thought. “To be left adrift here! Bos’n!”

His voice was sharp. He had picked up the white speck that was Charteris’ boat.

“A quarter west! Call the cap’n. I see a boat!”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

The wheel spun. A messenger raced aft to get the captain.

The captain took his position on the bridge and whistled down the speaking-tube.

“Engine room,” he said, “bridge speaking. Can you get a couple more knots outta this hooker?”

The funnels belched black smoke. The destroyer’s frame quivered as her mighty engines thrust her forward with renewed speed.

She stood by Charteris’ floating prison. A boat was lowered and able seamen lifted Charteris, trying weakly to salute someone they could not see, to its security.

“I’ll be honored to sign on, sir,” mumbled Charteris vaguely.

They had seen men adrift in open boats before. They knew what the sea and sun can do. So they looked at him sympathetically and went about the business of transferring him to the cutter.

Tenderly the hard seamen carried him below, still talking of things they did not understand, of drowned ships, and that ghastly whistle on the *Saturnia*.

Charteris gazed wildly about him. He seemed to be trying to place his surroundings. “My new quarters, Cap’n?” he asked hoarsely.

“Take it easy, son—you’re all shipshape now,” advised a grizzled bosun’s mate.

Charteris looked at the speaker without comprehension. Suddenly he fell back and began to babble unintelligibly.

The old bosun’s mate pursed his lips and spat thoughtfully. Then he bent forward.

His eyes widened. Swiftly he straightened and crossed himself reverently.

“Cripes!” said he in amazement; “how’d *this* guy know Lucks—and know he had false teeth?”

Dust

by Edna Goit Brintnall

At first, Nellie thought it was all only a dream. There had been no stinging summons from the rusty little alarm clock, no petulant call from her mother's room down the long flight of stairs. Yet she could hear her mother moving about in the kitchen and her father's low answers. Miraculously enough, they were not quarreling.

She lay very still and tried to readjust herself. She was very tired and it was pleasant, unbelievably pleasant, to just lie quietly and pretend she was asleep.

It was high time she was getting father's breakfast, and a rather pathetic breakfast it would be. Just the two of them always. Mother usually had a headache and Nellie took breakfast up to her on a tray. Not a tray with a rose clinging lovingly to the curl of a long crystal vase, but roses were expensive and not to be thought of even in mid-summer. Mother usually ate her breakfast and turned over discontentedly and went back to sleep. Then Nellie hurried downstairs and dusted the living-room. Mother was most particular about the living-room. Beyond the living-room nothing much mattered.

Nellie sensed that she was lying on the couch in the alcove off the living-room. It was stuffy; she could smell the dust on the "porteurs" and the heavy odor of the afghan couch cover. There were six strips to the couch cover, two tan, two rust-red and two faded blue, alternating and strung together loosely with coarse tan twine.

Sometimes she and Wilbur sat there at night and Wilbur held her hand and kissed her (she skipped over the thought hurriedly), but she had never before lain quietly on its spongy softness. Mother spoke of the alcove as the cozy corner.

It was nice.

Even the sheet was over her face, just as she always put it (even in her own hard little bed up under the roof) to keep off the wind that sucked down through the flue in the chimney.

She liked her room, though it had nothing in it besides a very old marble-top dresser shabbily painted white, and an old mirror of her grandmother's, that once had been resplendent with shining gold leaf. It was nothing much to look at now, after she had painted the clusters

of grapes along the sides. Blobs of paint made pimples on the sides of the grapes, unpleasant even to think about. The bed was thin and white and iron. It was cold in winter—like the rest of the room, and hot in summer.

In the winter there was no heat. The tiny sheet-iron stove in the corner was not good to look at, but no one bothered to take it down. It was painfully inadequate against the winter winds that threw themselves off the lake and beat frantically against the eight tiny windows.

Only half of the woodwork was white. Nellie had intended it all to be white, but one can hardly judge the limits of a quart of paint. Even the white part was not all white—just a muddy gray where the deep brown of the old woodwork showed through—and now only two of the windows would open. The paint held them quite securely, making the room like a furnace during the hot summer nights.

Even at that Nellie liked the room.

There were eight more of such rooms strung along the row toward the street corner. Nellie often wondered what they looked like—if they were as warm and as cold as hers, and if the wallpapers were as pretty as hers. Nellie loved the wallpaper. She had selected it herself. It was pale green with broad silver trellises fairly bursting with pink roses, roses that hung over her bed in joyous profusion. So low was the ceiling that she could fancy herself lying in bed and merely reaching out one slim arm and gathering handfuls to her thin young breasts.

Looking at the flowers, she forgot the paint, and the lack of curtains at the windows didn't bother her any more. She had wanted Swiss curtains with pink dots and frilled tie-backs, but as her mother convinced her—curtains were not necessary up so high from the street. No one saw.

As the door opened softly, she lay very still. It was too nice for just a little longer.

She wondered why her father hadn't gone to work, wrenching himself into his coat, pulling his hat down viciously over his bespectacled eyes and slamming the door until the colored glass fairly rattled in its casing.

From the kitchen she could hear the mother's voice as a general directing his army.

"Be careful now, with that dust-rag. Wipe off the window-sills and the top of the piano and the rungs of the chairs!"

So Father was dusting!

She would have loved to peek out from under the sheet, just to have seen him, but it was all too delicious.

Mother getting breakfast! Father dusting!

Too delicious just to lie all warm and comfortable and let some one else do something.

Her mother came through the dining-room and stood in the doorway.

"We can put those roses in the green vase," she was saying to her father, "two whole dozen roses—from the Goodmans' around the corner!"

Two dozen roses—it was beyond comprehension!

Soon she would stir herself and get up and wash the vase—'way down at the bottom so that no brown line would show—but not now—no, not now!

She thought about the house—stiff with red, dark red brick and a jutting porch that went up stiffly as if making a long nose at the shabby cellar beneath. It had cutwork and balls and scrolls all painted red, dark red like the brick.

The living-room was nice. Mother always spoke of it that way. There was the onyx table with a bronze statue on it, by the front window—the bronze lamp with the big red shade on the glass-top table by the morris chair. There were green over-curtains—scant, very scant, it was true, and not quite covering the coarse lace edgings of the scrim curtains underneath, but Mother had made them in a hurry and her sense of measurement was not always accurate. Still they looked nice.

The piano was rosewood. Even Father was proud of the piano, though there had been weeks of wrangling and bitter biting argument over it, but Mother won. Mother always did.

Just as she had about the house. Father had wanted a house in the country. A house that stood by itself and didn't have to be propped up by seven others, all alike in a row like alphabet blocks. A house that had sides to it that one could see and not only just one stern high front. Windows that looked wide to the sun and not into a gray court that grew darker and darker as it neared the dining-room windows.

Perhaps that was why the dining-room was rarely dusted. No one could see dust in the dining-room, even in midday—that is, no one but Father. Father could see and sometimes he wrote the word *Dust* in a big scrawling hand across the shelf of the high golden-oak sideboard. It always made Mother angry—which he knew it would. Often Nellie saw it before Mother did, though she was not so tall; and that saved a row.

Nellie hated rows, but Father and Mother seemed to enjoy them.

Father always telling about his mother's housekeeping and Mother flinging back about never having a dime to call her own.

Often Nellie could hear them below her—tense bitter voices snarling at each other in the darkness.

But when callers came Mother and Father took on, in some mysterious fashion, the niceness of the living-room. Mother was proud of the Oriental rugs and Father even praised the piano.

Nellie didn't stir. She heard Mother's steps close beside her—very close beside her. She was speaking.

"I think the roses look nicest here, don't you? We can put the rest of the flowers here—but the roses *are* lovely!"

"She liked roses," said the father.

"I like roses too, but with never a dime—" She stopped, suddenly; her father said nothing.

"Her graduating-dress was a bit too small, but I split it down the back. Looks real nice against—" her mother continued.

"She has real pretty hair." Her father seemed very close to her. He was praising her. Tears flooded to her eyes, but she kept her lips closed tight. She wanted to hear more—just a very little more.

"I had real pretty hair, too, once—you used to say so yourself—but what with scrimping and washing and ironing and standing over a hot stove and raising a—" Her mother hesitated.

"She wasn't exactly thankless," her father said, slowly, as if supplying the word. "Maybe we shouldn't have said she had to marry Wilbur. Wilbur is a nice fellow, but maybe she didn't just fancy him—girls are sometimes that way. Maybe, if we hadn't just forced her too far, she woulda got used to the idea slow-like and not run out into the street like a wild thing and get runned over by a fire engine."

Nellie felt her mother's breath freeze against her lips.

"Don't you ever let me hear you say those words again—not to anybody, any time," she said firmly. "After all, she was running out to see where the fire was and that's how it all happened."

"I guess you're right," said the father.

"Well, I've got all the food ready and most of the flowers set up and you better go up and get a fresh collar on and your black gloves ready. The man ought to be here now any minute and you can help lift her."

Her mother came close to her and lifted the sheet. Nellie kept her eyes tightly closed and waited.

"She looks real nice," she said almost defiantly, "just like she was sleeping."

"Yes," said her father, "just like she was sleeping."

Her mother laid the sheet back over her face. They tiptoed away.

The heavy scent of roses came back to Nellie pleasantly. She wished the "porteurs" didn't smell like dust.

So close the roses seemed, as if she could reach out one slender arm and gather them to her thin young bosom.

She was very tired. She wondered about the alarm clock. Perhaps there had never been any alarm clock. Perhaps she had only been dreaming.

It was nice of the Goodmans to send roses to her mother. They were nice people—even her mother and father were nice. A nice living-room it was. A nice couch, comfortable, restful. . . .

Even Wilbur was nice. . . .

She gave a thin, peaceful little sigh—the room was dusted—somewhere Father was putting on a clean collar and some black gloves—somewhere Mother, well—it was just all—too—nice. . . .

Nellie slept.

Edge of the Cliff

by Dorothy Quick

The girl sat on the edge of a cliff and gazed down at the jagged rocks below her, watching the water beat relentlessly upon them. The last rose tints of the sunset gave the eddying waters a translucent loveliness, but she shuddered as she looked at them. She couldn't see the beauty, only that the rocks and water were terribly far away.

"I haven't the courage," she half whispered, her voice lost in the rushing waters. For a long while she sat quite still, staring blankly before her. From somewhere in the distance came the shriek of a whistle.

Automatically the girl raised her head, listened, and laughed—a laugh that had no mirth in it. Her thoughts, which had been a formless confusion, suddenly focused.

"The factory whistle. Jim will be home soon. How he'll rave when

he doesn't find me. If I went back, he'd beat me. But I won't go! Dear God, help me to be brave."

With the force of her prayer she clasped her hands and moved convulsively. As she did so her pump slipped off and went down into the dimness. She strained her eyes to watch, but she could discern nothing in the darkness. So she listened, every nerve tense.

But she heard nothing—only the swishing snarl of the water beating on the rocks. Her slipper had gone—soon she would follow. She dully wondered if it would hurt. She saw herself lying crushed and mangled, perhaps not dead, and began to shake. Unsteadily she got to her feet. She was going away from the terror of the cliff, back to Jim— It would be horrible, but at least she knew what it was like.

"If I were only brave," she thought, "I wouldn't go back." She buried her face in her hands and sobbed hopelessly.

All at once she was conscious of someone near. She took her hands away to look. There was a stranger standing beside her.

"What is the matter?" he asked softly. There was no light and she could not see his face, but something in his voice swept her terror away.

Without an instant's hesitation she began, "I want to die." She pointed downward. "But I haven't the courage."

"Perhaps I can help you." There was deep understanding in his tones. "But first you must tell me why."

Strangely she didn't wonder that he made no attempt to preach or dissuade her from her project. Her soul went out to the sympathy and understanding she sensed in him. Her words came tumbling out jerkily, one sentence after another.

"I loved Bob—my family married me to Jim. Jim had money—a house. I was pretty and could cook. Jim didn't love me, but I was useful. I hated him!" She clenched her hands until the nails, digging into the soft flesh, brought drops of blood to the surface.

"Yes?" questioned the stranger. "So—" Monosyllables which left a gap to be filled.

She went on, "I tried hard to like Jim—I couldn't. He was a drunken beast. Bob kept on being sweet to me, brought me little things when Jim wasn't there. Once he found me crying, saw my arms all black and blue. Then he took me in his arms." She paused a second to savor fully the joys of the remembrance.

"We decided to go away together when Bob got enough money," the thread of her memory continued to unwind. "Jim came home early. I hid Bob but Jim was drunk. He began beating me. I tried to be

brave, but God must have been asleep that night. I cried out. Bob came to help me—and Jim killed him!”

The stranger was silent.

She continued, “Jim got off—he was a wronged husband. The jury was on his side. It was worse than ever for me when he came back. I can’t stand it anymore. I want to go to Bob, only—I’m not brave enough.”

The stranger moved a little nearer.

“It only takes a minute,” he whispered, but in his low tones there was a vibrancy. “One second and it is over.”

Her slight figure swayed, “I can’t!” she gasped.

The stranger took another step.

“You won’t be alone. I will go too,” he said slowly.

“But why?” she began, then suddenly reached her hand out toward him.

He ignored that and took a step toward the edge of the cliff. “Come.”

She moved forward. All at once she was aware of the sound of the water striking the rocks below—those sharp, jagged rocks. She shrank back. “I’m afraid.”

“Then return to him!” He flung the words at her.

“No, no!” cried the girl.

“You must choose between Jim and Bob,” he said sternly, then added, “once you did not take so long to decide.”

“Bob might not find me,” she sobbed.

“It only takes a second,” he pleaded, “and then there is—Eternity!”

The girl shivered again. “It is very dark!”

“At the bottom there is light.”

“It will be very cold.”

The stranger smiled. “My arms will be warm. Come!” he said softly, and this time held out his hand.

The girl tried to grasp it, but he was going down—down into the blackness. There was a strange luminous light about him. It didn’t look quite so dark. The girl suddenly found courage.

“Wait!” she cried, “I am coming!”

From below the stranger was smiling at her with Bob’s smile, and his arms were outstretched. He wasn’t a stranger anymore—he was—Bob! Without one second’s hesitation, she flung herself into his arms.

They went down and down, toward the bottom. Bob’s lips were warm on hers. She did not even know when the waters enveloped her completely.

People who know me say that I am insane. Many of them tell me so to my face. They do it jokingly, but in their eyes I read that they half believe it.

But who wouldn't be crazy after going through what I experienced during those dread hours when, huddled in the after cockpit of a wrecked airplane, in the very center of the dread Gran Estero, the pilot dead in the seat ahead of me with his brains dashed out, I sat the hours away with my eyes peering into the shadows of the great swamp?

Perhaps I did not see all the things memory brings to mind from that dread page of the past. For the silver plate in my head suggests many things, added to which there is a long blank in it somewhere during which I somehow won free of the mysterious region of rotting slime and bubbling ooze—a blank that I find myself glad I can not fill. For it must have contained terrible things.

We had taken off from the flying field at Santo Domingo City with plenty of time to spare ere we should be due at Santiago. It only takes a little over an hour, and it still lacked three hours of sundown when we lifted, in a series of climbing turns, into the sunny sky of the Dominican Republic.

But we had forgotten the fog which sometimes rises suddenly in the Pass through the Cordilleras.

We were half-way through when the fog was upon us, shutting us out from the ground below as effectually as though we both had suddenly gone blind, and were hurtling through a sea of mist at more than a hundred miles an hour—quite too fast to think of piling up on some unseen mountainside. I could scarcely see the pilot in the seat ahead. He looked back at me once and shook his head. Then he tried to see the ground below us, as did I. But whichever way we looked there was nothing but that sea of impenetrable white. Even the roaring of the engines was muffled by the density of the fog.

The pilot came back on his stick, and I knew by the way my back pressed against the cowl in rear that he was pointing her nose into the sky in the hope of climbing above the clouds.

Minutes that seemed like hours passed as we continued to climb, on

a slant just great enough to keep from stalling, but great enough that I knew we had already cleared the tops of the mountains on either hand. Yet the fog held steadily. It must have been miles high.

Then the aviator got confused. I don't blame him. Though I have never flown a plane I have ridden in planes many times, and know what it means to be caught in a fog or among heavy clouds which shut out the earth. Had he flown straight he might have ridden through the fog; but he did a turn or two in an attempt to find an opening, and lost us completely. Only by the slackness of the belt which held me in could I be sure that we were flying right-side up—which was all I did know!

The altimeter said 10,000 feet, with the needle crawling slowly toward the 11,000 mark! And still the fog.

Finally the flyer held her nose in one direction, at least he tried to, and plunged like a mad thing through the fog. Yet we didn't penetrate the mist wall.

Long after we should have reached Santiago we were still in the fog, still above 8,000 feet, and darkness was settling down upon us.

There was enough gas in the tanks when we left the field to keep us in the air for four hours. My wristwatch told me that we lacked but fifteen minutes of that time! In God's name, where were we? We might as easily have been far out over the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea or Mona Passage.

I know now that we came down within five miles of Bahia de Escocesa, which is an arm of the Atlantic, and that, had our luck held for a few minutes more, we might have made a fairly safe landing on the broad shelving beach. Just a few minutes, as time is figured, and a life is lost—while another man lives to hear himself called a madman!

The engine spluttered and died. What a dread silence after the roaring of the motors!

The humming of the wind through the wires and braces told me that we were spiraling downward. We might be headed for a mountaintop or for the open sea and certain drowning—or might be heading directly into the field at Santiago, though only a fool would have hoped for such great good fortune. And still the fog about us held.

The pilot flung his helmet and goggles over the side and looked back at me, grinning widely.

"We're through, kid!" he said. "Ain't one chance in ten thousand of getting out of this with our hides. Let's hope that they find the remains sometime."

I am not ashamed to confess that I could not take it so light-heart-

edly as this; but then I am not made of the stuff of which flyers are constructed.

The aviator turned his eyes back to the instruments on the board before him, and our spiral continued to the tune of the wind in the struts, a tune that had a sinister meaning, a tune that sang of death up-rushing to meet us. The altimeter said 1,500 feet now, with the needle fairly dancing down toward zero.

When we broke through the fog we were directly above a forest of nodding treetops, with scarcely a breathing space before the inevitable crash, which could have been avoided only did a miracle happen and the propeller start whirling again.

It seemed to me that we leveled and seemed to sink straight into the forest, though common sense told me that we must have struck at a speed of not less than ninety miles an hour. We hit the treetops and crashed through.

My head banged against the cowl when we hit, and I remember nothing afterward—until I opened my eyes in the shadows which hold sway in El Gran Estero, and found that the safety belt still held me in my seat. What was left of our right wing was above the dank waters of the vast swamp, while on my left I could see nothing but shadows, and the oozy slime of the dread quagmire. Only the main part of our ship had held together, and this was steadily sinking forward because of the dead weight of the motor.

The aviator was asprawl in the forward cockpit, his arms hanging over the side. I noted that blood dripped from the fingers of his right hand.

I unfastened my belt and leaned forward, swaying dizzily as a terrible feeling of vertigo seized me.

I shook the aviator roughly by the shoulder.

“McKenzie!” I shouted. “Are you bad hurt, boy?”

He was. For, as I shook him, pulling him around by the shoulder, I caught a glimpse of his face. It was not a face, but a bloody smear, with a gaping wound in the forehead. His body was still warm, proof that I had been unconscious but a short time. There was no mark of blood on the cowl before McKenzie’s face, and I wondered what had dealt him that blow which had dashed out his brains. Leaning forward carefully I strove to peer down into the cockpit.

When I saw what had done it I all but collapsed. For the forward cockpit had fallen squarely upon the jagged stump of a tree and this had gone through the light fabric and penetrated McKenzie’s body in a way that I find myself unable to mention in cold print. He had been

dead even before that blood-stained stump had come on through to bash out his brains.

There was nothing I could do for him. And there seemed little chance of saving myself.

I knew that I was somewhere within mysterious Gran Estero, in a plane that was gradually sinking of its own weight—and that I was mighty fortunate to have lived even this long. Besides which I knew that I was badly hurt, how badly I could only guess—as you can do when I tell you that a goodly portion of my skull is silver at the present moment.

How to get out, and what direction to take? How to reach land solid enough to support my weight? In the daytime I knew I could have done it somehow—had I been in full possession of my faculties and my strength.

I studied the swamp around me, but as far as I could see in the darkness there was nothing but oozy morass, into which I should have disappeared within a few minutes at most. Ever the plane seemed to sink lower, as though a great mouth were relentlessly sucking it down.

My head was aching terribly, and oddly colored dots were dancing before my eyes. Any moment I expected to lose consciousness—and rather hoped that, did I do so, I would never regain it. Death would be easy, and would save me untold trouble and privation, to say nothing of unplumbed suffering.

“Well, why don’t you climb out of there and find us a way out?”

I started as though someone had suddenly placed a hot iron against my quivering flesh. In my mind I heard the words, yet I swear that my ears had heard nothing at all. Just an impression that someone had spoken—an impression that had the force of actuality.

The hair at the back of my neck seemed to lift oddly as I whirled and stared into the gloom which was now so deep in Gran Estero that I could scarcely see my hand before my face.

Under a tree with many great branches, in the very midst of an area acrawl with the ooze of the vast quagmire, stood Lieutenant McKenzie, boyishly smiling as he had smiled before the crash! From his puttees to his helmet and goggles he was dressed for flying—save for that ghastly red weal across his forehead!

My eyes must have bulged from their sockets as I stared at him; for he smiled again and the smile froze on his lips, never again to leave them. This time when he spoke his voice sounded hollow, and as cold as a voice from the tomb.

“Well, get going! We must get out of here!”

Yet I couldn’t move a muscle!

Will you understand why when I mention that the dead body of McKenzie still lolled motionless in the forward cockpit?

McKenzie was dead, killed in a manner that has many times since caused me to waken from horrible nightmares with screams on my lips; yet he couldn't be dead when I could see him, as plainly as you see this page, standing there beneath that tree in the midst of Gran Estero!

I screamed aloud when I found that I could look through that figure under the tree and see the bole of the tree itself. Still that frozen smile rested upon those white lips; still that red weal showed on the forehead beneath the helmet—a red weal that seemed to be steadily dripping, dripping, dripping.

Then I began to laugh, a horrible laugh, in which my body shook so convulsively that I all but fell out of the cockpit into the slime.

And as I laughed the phantom of McKenzie disappeared as though a breath had erased it, leaving me alone in the sinking plane with the dead body for company.

But my laughter was short-lived.

For, looking around again for some possible footing place, my eyes found something in the swamp which had at first escaped my notice—a pair of bare feet, with their water-whitened soles just above the surface of the ooze! By some weird necromancy I could look down through the mud to the body which hung upside-down below those feet—the skeleton of a native who had been lost in the swamp.

For some reason my eyes darted back to where I had seen the phantom of McKenzie, to see the figure of a ragged native in his place. This one looked at me out of sunken eyes, and slowly his arm upraised as he pointed to the bare feet, which were all that I could now see of the gruesome thing just outside the plane. A voice issued from the motionless lips of the native—a voice that spoke soft words in gentle Spanish.

"Sí, Señor," said the voice, "it is I whom you see there!"

Wildly I laughed, and the phantom of the native vanished as the shade of McKenzie had done at the sound of my maniacal laughter.

Wildly, since I knew that my mind was going because of this weird horror, I searched the jungle wall with frightened eyes.

The night drew on apace, and I will not dwell on it unduly, for I know that in that direction lies madness—madness more mad, even, than is now mine.

For I discovered that El Gran Estero is the trysting place of countless shades!

Out of the shadows they came to stare at me—out of the shadows

to stare, to smile coldly, and to vanish—while I laughed at each in turn.

It is strange that I laughed; but I could not help it, for my head ached abominably, and I laughed to ease the pain. Is that a good reason? To me at the time it seemed so; but perhaps I laughed at the faces.

The faces?

I lost count of their vast number, for assuredly there must have been many who have lost their lives in El Gran Estero—whose faces came up before me, for the lips to smile coldly, to smile coldly and to vanish, while others came to take their places.

As it grew cooler as the night drew on, will-o'-the-wisps came up from the ooze. Balls of weird flame, balls that had the shape of faces with smiling lips—all sorts of faces. Faces of negroes, men and women—yes, and children; faces of Dominicans, bronze-burnished by a smiling sun, with here and there the pale, staring faces of white men. Thank God there were but few of these! For I found myself unable to look into their staring eyes. It was as though the white men were brothers of mine, and that I had somehow failed them in the weary search for a way out of the vast quagmire. When they smiled coldly, reproachfully, and I could give them no aid, they would shake their heads sadly and disappear, only to show again down some vista through the tree-lanes, always looking back at me sadly before they disappeared for good.

The saddest of them all was a white woman with a babe in her arms. She stood for many minutes where McKenzie and the native had stood, and her eyes were sunken caverns ablaze with a vast reproach. Her eyes searched ceaselessly the wall of trees, seeking, seeking, seeking. At last she wandered down a lane through the trees, gliding softly atop the ooze. She looked back several times as she wandered aimlessly away, and once I fancied I could hear the subdued wailing of the babe in her arms. She must have heard it, too, for her head bent as though she soothed the phantom infant. She did not look up again, and, thus soothing the baby with which she must have died, she vanished into the vastness of the swamp. I wondered what man had been the cause of her going to her death in Gran Estero. For there was that in her eyes that told me a man was to blame.

Faces, faces, always the faces! And the dead blackness of El Gran Estero.

When all the shades I had seen, together with a host I had never seen before, some of the latter aborigines who must have gone to their death in the swamp during the regime of Columbus and his governors,

came at last and gathered in the ooze about me, to smile coldly and sadly into my face, I must have gone clear out of my head, for that is the last dread happening which I remember.

The plane had sunk so low that slime was beginning to trickle into the cockpit in which I still sat huddled, when the army of shades gathered about me—silent and motionless as though they waited for something. Did they wait for me to lead them out of this never-ending thralldom of theirs? I do not know. I do not know anything about it.

I only know the next thing I remember is that I awoke in a cot in the hospital in Santiago, and that the colonel of the regiment occupying the city was sitting at my bedside. When I opened my eyes the colonel turned to the doctor.

“Can he talk now, Doctor?”

The doctor nodded.

I told the colonel all that had befallen me. As I talked I saw a queer light come into his eyes, and knew that he doubted my story, may perhaps even have blamed me a little for what happened. I wonder why. His questions took a queer trend at the last.

“Why didn’t you go back into the swamp with McKenzie and help him salvage the engine of the plane?”

“But McKenzie is dead, sir! He was killed in the crash!”

Again that queer light in his eyes.

“But the natives who found you at the edge of the swamp swear that a man in uniform was with you—a man in helmet and goggles, a man answering in every detail the description of McKenzie. They say he led you out; but that as soon as he had attracted their attention and saw that you would be taken in charge, he turned back into the swamp before they could come close to him. You should have gone back in with him.”

But assuredly the colonel must have been mistaken. Perhaps his limited Spanish caused him to misinterpret the reports of the natives. I *know*, in my heart, that McKenzie never left that forward cockpit after the crash into El Gran Estero.

But do I know? After all there is that blank to be accounted for, and often I waken in the middle of the night and lie awake until dawn, wondering.

Fancy That

by J. N. Williamson

"Fancy meeting you here!" A pleased resonance.

"Well, I like *that!* Who else would you expect to meet in your bedroom, mister?"

"It certainly isn't like the old days." Mock sigh. "Hold on, don't turn away. Please. I was only joking."

Mood shift. "I'm so glad you married me this morning." Genuine pause of concern. "It *was* this morning. Wasn't it?"

"—Was it? Feels like an eternity. Wait; that isn't a joke, honey. It really does seem like some while ago. Or, always. I'm confused about it."

"Darling, it doesn't matter when we got married. Only that we were. And are."

"Look, beautiful, let's meet this way every now and then. All right?"

A smile to be recognized, experienced, by other senses. "I'm not sure we even have a choice about it. But this is special; I *want* to be with you, this way . . . 'Night."

"Night."

"Fancy meeting you this way." The hint of a chuckle.

"I'm not here now because I wished to be! I know about *her*, and what you did."

"But I didn't . . . All right, you've got me. I can't lie, *this* way." With great earnestness, and again now: "But I only kissed her once or twice. Well—three or four times. That's all."

"At a time when I scarcely even felt like a woman!"

"That's why I—the *other* part of 'me'—did it." Anguished sigh. "Because, being pregnant, you don't feel pretty, don't feel like you. When you're *you*, you're always pretty to me. Always."

"Perhaps that's the truth. I don't think we can lie, this way. But don't do it again, darling. Please? We have made us as we're meant to be—but either of us can change that, can spoil it forever. I sense that—don't you?"

"I do. And I'm sorry." Awkward, tender pause. "Wish I could touch you now. Put my arm around you."

"Remember, tomorrow, that you want to." Urgency, stridently but sweetly. "And try not to let your pride get in the way."

"I will. And try not to forget that I love *all* of you, *all* you *are*. 'Night."

" 'Night."

"Fancy meeting you after all this . . . *whatever* it is."

"Darling, we must talk. This way." Concerned hum of need.

"You absolutely mustn't worry that, well, you *couldn't*. Last night, before sleep. You had a rough day. It wasn't your fault. You worry so much about Billy and that crowd of friends he runs with. They—"

"It isn't just that." Something quite like a sigh. "I'm not forty yet, but I'm—I'm over the hill."

"Not really. Just the *other* 'you'; just temporarily!" Merriment, reassuringly.

"Honey, that other part can be important, too. Look, I can't help how I feel."

Softly, seductively. "That's why I wanted us to meet *this* way once more."

"Come *on*." Rueful, unpleasant vibrations. "What can we do this way?"

Still more softly: "Everything else, I think. Reach each other more deeply than the other way. Try. *Try*, just remembering that you love . . . all I *am*."

Out-reaching, outpouring of private, unspoken emotions. Openness, and receiving. Contacting, mutually experienced; known; accepted. "I do love you, babe. Oh, I *do*."

"Wasn't that lovely?" Bubbling contentment. "Hm-m, you're something special!"

"But y'didn't say 'I love you, too.' *Do* you, still, after the years—after what a fool I am—after how many times I forget *this* us?"

"Always and always, I love you.—Better?"

"So much. 'Night."

" 'Night . . ."

"Fancy my wanting to meet you here. This way. You know why, don't you?"

Distance. No fast reply. A dark, small resistance, lies impossible. "You probably desire to bully me, about our son. —No; that's not it. You never bullied anyone. But—"

"Honey, Bill has a life of his own. What's happening to him is not your fault. Or mine."

"But he's so unhappy, so miserable. He's ruining *everything*."

"No. Not everything." Very firm. "Not—*us*. Unless you allow it to happen."

"You've never understood for an instant what it is to be a mother, to give birth, raise them, go *on* caring—"

"But Bill's path is *his*." Even more firmly, but gently. "Now he must find himself, and someone for him. On his own. There is nothing that you and I—or *we*, when we're that by day—can do to help him find himself, and her."

"I yearn to save him, darling, so badly. He's meant so *much*. I want him to—"

"To satisfy your hopes for him; mine; ours?" Noiseless, wry laughing vibration. "I wanted this, too, remember? Remember how I tried first to get him into Olympics-style sports—then when he grew up, I wanted him to become a—"

"You were so *silly* about Billy!" The return, mercifully, of laughter. "Yet tried, showed him you cared; you were there. After awhile, darling, that was all there was for you to do."

"Which is what I have been telling *you*! One more point: As long as we both want it to be that way, more than anything else, there will always be *us*. We cannot keep Bill part of us; he never truly was. But you have me, honey, and I have you—for ever." Sweet, snuggling sounds. "I love you. 'Night."

"Fancy this: I'm old. Not getting old. *Old*."

"Well, I like *that*! What would I want with an old person in my bedroom, Mister!"

"Beats me. You haven't gotten old at all, beautiful."

Scornful but pleased amusement. "You look at me first, always, with your daylight eyes, my love. And sometimes I think you have never seen me clearly, at all."

"Oh, yes; I have." A shaky, wandering whisper. "Those times I've had to be away from you. And *these* times, when—when I can't quite see you at all. Yet I know you best, now."

"You see me precisely as I see you, these times." A pause. "As all the things we truly are, used to be, nearly became, and *will* be, for good." Low-pitched, laugh-like vibration. "Honestly, hon, don't you understand yet what we are doing, now, and exactly what we are?"

No quick answer. "Sometimes I believe we are one another's dreams. At other moments, I think we are—ghosts, somehow. Because

we meet this way only in the dark, at midnight and beyond. Yet I awaken and there's daylight and I believe you arise, too. Or is *that* the dream?"

"No, no. But this—these precious moments—are the threshold of the *long* reality, the *important, enduring* reality."

Irascible masculine resonance: "I don't get it! I've tried, but I do *not* understand—*this*. All I know is that you are truly you and I am I. Not as we are by day, but . . . *more*, in an odd way. And another thing I know, beautiful: That when I awaken, I never consciously remember these nocturnal meetings."

"And yet, they influence you, and me, during the period of light." A contemplative moment, as if used to gather difficult thought. "You married me in the morning of my grownup life, and I'm still glad. But of course, you don't 'consciously' remember these times, silly. These are the moments when, in our sleep, our *unconscious selves* may talk, commune—always with honesty, forever to reaffirm our love and enable us to make the waking *us* go on."

"We're our *own* ghosts, then?" Wonder; understanding. "But how could you figure it out, how can you know?"

"Unlike you, a part of me has always remembered the night. And"—a loving, cautious pause—"the daylight time is drawing to a close."

"Should I fear it?" Wind, whispering softly across the sleeping, the aged forms, bony and brittle under the press of winter blankets. "Should I—fear—that real night that is coming?"

"Silly!" Two syllables like lips kissing. "Remember, you said that you loved '*all of me there is*?' Well, *that* is what lies ahead for you; and you are what lies ahead for me. Truly so, and for the first time: The *all* of love."

Hesitation. "I'm so tired." The slightest tremor. "'Night."

"'Night."

"Fancy meeting you—*here*!"

"Well, I like that! Who else would you expect to meet for eternity?"

"You're . . . lovely. And *this—this* is something special." Wonder; joy. "I see you, everything, *clearly* now! Good morning!"

"It is, isn't it?" Smiling satisfaction, an embrace, a loving kiss. "A very *good* morning . . . !"

Father Macclesfield's Tale

by R. H. Benson

Monsignor Maxwell announced next day at dinner that he had already arranged for the evening's entertainment. A priest, whose acquaintance he had made on the Palatine, was leaving for England the next morning; and it was our only chance therefore of hearing his story. That he had a story had come to the Canon's knowledge in the course of a conversation on the previous afternoon.

'He told me the outline of it,' he said. 'I think it very remarkable. But I had a great deal of difficulty in persuading him to repeat it to the company this evening. But he promised at last. I trust, gentlemen, you do not think I have presumed in begging him to do so.'

Father Macclesfield arrived at supper.

He was a little unimposing dry man, with a hooked nose and grey hair. He was rather silent at supper; but there was no trace of shyness in his manner as he took his seat upstairs, and without glancing round once, began in an even and dispassionate voice:

'I once knew a Catholic girl that married an old Protestant three times her own age. I entreated her not to do so; but it was useless. And when the disillusionment came she used to write to me piteous letters, telling me that her husband had in reality no religion at all. He was a convinced infidel; and scouted even the idea of the soul's immortality.

'After two years of married life the old man died. He was about sixty years old; but very hale and hearty till the end.

'Well, when he took to his bed, the wife sent for me; and I had half-a-dozen interviews with him; but it was useless. He told me plainly that he wanted to believe—in fact he said that the thought of annihilation was intolerable to him. If he had had a child he would not have hated death so much; if his flesh and blood in any manner survived him, he could have fancied that he had a sort of vicarious life left; but as it was there was no kith or kin of his alive; and he could not bear that.'

Father Macclesfield sniffed cynically, and folded his hands.

'I may say that his death-bed was extremely unpleasant. He was a coarse old fellow, with plenty of strength in him; and he used to make remarks about the churchyard—and—and in fact the worms, that used to send his poor child of a wife half fainting out of the room. He had lived an immoral life too, I gathered.

'Just at the last it was—well—disgusting. He had no consideration (God knows why she married him!). The agony was a very long one; he caught at the curtains round the bed; calling out; and all his words were about death, and the dark. It seemed to me that he caught hold of the curtains as if to hold himself into this world. And at the very end he raised himself clean up in bed, and stared horribly out of the window that was open just opposite.

'I must tell you that straight away beneath the window lay a long walk, between sheets of dead leaves with laurels on either side, and the branches meeting overhead, so that it was very dark there even in summer; and at the end of the walk away from the house was the churchyard gate.'

Father Macclesfield paused and blew his nose. Then he went on still without looking at us.

'Well, the old man died; and he was carried along this laurel path, and buried.

'His wife was in such a state that I simply dared not go away. She was frightened to death, and, indeed, the whole affair of her husband's dying was horrible. But she would not leave the house. She had a fancy that it would be cruel to him. She used to go down twice a day to pray at the grave; but she never went along the laurel walk. She would go round by the garden and in at a lower gate, and come back the same way, or by the upper garden.

'This went on for three or four days. The man had died on a Saturday, and was buried on Monday; it was in July; and he had died about eight o'clock.

'I made up my mind to go on the Saturday after the funeral. My curate had managed along very well for a few days; but I did not like to leave him for a second Sunday.

'Then on the Friday at lunch—her sister had come down, by the way, and was still in the house—on the Friday the widow said something about never daring to sleep in the room where the old man had died. I told her it was nonsense, and so on, but you must remember she was in a dreadful state of nerves, and she persisted. So I said I would sleep in the room myself. I had no patience with such ideas then.

‘Of course she said all sorts of things, but I had my way; and my things were moved in on Friday evening.

‘I went to my new room about a quarter before eight to put on my cassock for dinner. The room was very much as it had been—rather dark because of the trees at the end of the walk outside. There was the four-poster there with the damask curtains; the table and chairs, the cupboard where his clothes were kept, and so on.

‘When I had put my cassock on, I went to the window to look out. To right and left were the gardens, with the sunlight just off them, but still very bright and gay, with the geraniums, and exactly opposite was the laurel walk, like a long green shady tunnel, dividing the upper and lower lawns.

‘I could see straight down it to the churchyard gate, which was about a hundred yards away, I suppose. There were limes overhead, and laurels, as I said, on each side.

‘Well—I saw some one coming up the walk; but it seemed to me at first that he was drunk. He staggered several times as I watched; I suppose he would be fifty yards away—and once I saw him catch hold of one of the trees and cling against it as if he were afraid of falling. Then he left it, and came on again slowly, going from side to side, with his hands out. He seemed desperately keen to get to the house.

‘I could see his dress; and it astonished me that a man dressed so should be drunk; for he was quite plainly a gentleman. He wore a white top hat, and a grey cut-away coat, and grey trousers, and I could make out his white spats.

‘Then it struck me he might be ill; and I looked harder than ever, wondering whether I ought to go down.

‘When he was about twenty yards away he lifted his face; and it struck me as very odd, but it seemed to me he was extraordinarily like the old man we had buried on Monday; but it was darkish where he was, and the next moment he dropped his face, threw up his hands and fell flat on his back.

‘Well, of course, I was startled at that, and I leaned out of the window and called out something. He was moving his hands I could see, as if he were in convulsions; and I could hear the dry leaves rustling.

‘Well, then I turned and ran out and downstairs.’

Father Macclesfield stopped a moment.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said abruptly, ‘when I got there, there was not a sign of the old man. I could see that the leaves had been disturbed, but that was all.’

There was an odd silence in the room as he passed, but before any of us had time to speak he went on.

'If course I did not say a word of what I had seen. We dined as usual, I watched her an hour or so by myself after prayers, and then I went up to bed. I cannot say I was perfectly comfortable, but I was not, but neither was I frightened.

When I got to my room I lit all my candles, and there were in a big cupboard I had examined, and pulled out some of the drawers. In the bottom of the third drawer I found a gun not very long and very massive, I found several pairs of white spurs in the top drawer, and a white hat on the shelf above. That is the first incident.

'Did you drop there, Father?' said a voice within.

'I did, and the point, there was no reason why I should not. I did not fall asleep for two or three hours, but I was not disturbed in any way, and went to breakfast as usual.

'Well, I thought about it all a bit, and finally I went a way to my cousin telling him I was distressed. I did not like to leave the house just then.

Father Macfarland smiled himself again in his chair and went on in the same dry uninterested voice.

The bundle we drove over to the Catholic Church, no more all and I said Miss Neelings never happened till the Monday morning.

'That evening I went to the window again about a quarter before eight, as I had done both on the Saturday and Sunday. Everything was perfectly quiet till I heard the shouting and gun sounds, and I saw a man come through.

'But I was almost at once that it was not the same man I had seen before. I looked in on him a longer time for he had a gun across his arm, then I saw him hold the gun over his shoulder and a dog came through and began to run up the path towards the house with his master following.

'When the dog was about fifty yards away he stopped dead and pointed.

'I saw the keeper throw his gun forward and come up with it, and as he came the dog began to dash backwards. I watched very closely, almost forgetting who I was there, and the next instant something - it was not shadowy under the trees as we usually when it was - but a very strong shape about the size of a large horse ran off the laurels and made straight up the path, dodging from side to side, but running like the wind.

'The house could not have been more than twenty yards from me when the keeper fired, and the creature went over and over in the dry leaves, and in struggling and screaming it was horrible. But what

astonished me was that the dog did not come up. I heard the keeper snap out something, and then I saw the dog making off down the avenue in the direction of the churchyard as hard as he could go.

'The keeper was running now towards me; but the screaming of the hare, or of whatever it was, had stopped; and I was astonished to see the man come right up to where the beast was struggling and kicking, and then stop as if he was puzzled.

'I leaned out of the window and called to him.

' "Right in front of you, man," I said. "For God's sake kill the brute."

'He looked up at me, and then down again.

' "Where is it, sir?" he said. "I can't see it anywhere."

'And there lay the beast, clear before him all the while, not a yard away, still kicking.

'Well, I went out of the room and downstairs and out to the avenue.

'The man was standing there still, looking terribly puzzled, but the hare was gone. There was not a sign of it. Only the leaves were disturbed, and the wet earth showed beneath.

'The keeper said that it had been a great hare; he could have sworn to it; and that he had orders to kill all hares and rabbits in the garden enclosure. Then he looked rather odd.

' "Did you see it plainly, sir?" he asked.

'I told him, not very plainly; but I thought it a hare too.

' "Yes, sir," he said, "it was a hare, sure enough; but, do you know, sir, I thought it to be a kind of silver grey with white feet. I never saw one like that before!"

'The odd thing was that not a dog would come near, his own dog was gone; but I fetched the yard dog, a retriever, out of his kennel in the kitchen yard; and if ever I saw a frightened dog it was this one. When we dragged him up at last, all whining and pulling back, he began to snap at us so fiercely that we let go, and he went back like the wind to his kennel. It was the same with the terrier.

'Well, the bell had gone, and I had to go in and explain why I was late; but I didn't say anything about the colour of the hare. That was the second incident.'

Father Macclesfield stopped again, smiling reminiscently to himself. I was very much impressed by his quiet air and composure. I think it helped his story a good deal.

Again, before we had time to comment or question, he went on.

'The third incident was so slight that I should not have mentioned it, or thought anything of it, if it had not been for the others; but it

seemed to me there was a kind of diminishing gradation of energy, which explained. Well, now you shall hear.

‘On the other nights of that week I was at my window again; but nothing happened till the Friday. I had arranged to go for certain next day; the widow was much better and more reasonable, and even talked of going abroad herself in the following week.

‘On that Friday evening I dressed a little earlier, and went down to the avenue this time, instead of staying at my window, at about twenty minutes to eight.

‘It was rather a heavy depressing evening, without a breath of wind; and it was darker than it had been for some days.

‘I walked slowly down the avenue to the gate and back again; and I suppose it was fancy, but I felt more uncomfortable than I had felt at all up to then. I was rather relieved to see the widow come out of the house and stand looking down the avenue. I came out myself then and went towards her. She started rather when she saw me and then smiled.

‘“I thought it was some one else,” she said. “Father, I have made up my mind to go. I shall go to town tomorrow, and start on Monday. My sister will come with me.”

‘I congratulated her; and then we turned and began to walk back to the lime avenue. She stopped at the entrance, and seemed unwilling to come any further.

‘“Come down to the end,” I said, “and back again. There will be time before dinner.”

‘She said nothing, but came with me; and we went straight down to the gate and then turned to come back.

‘I don’t think either of us spoke a word; I was very uncomfortable indeed by now; and yet I had to go on.

‘We were half way back I suppose when I heard a sound like a gate rattling; and I whisked round in an instant, expecting to see someone at the gate. But there was no one.

‘Then there came a rustling overhead in the leaves; it had been dead still before. Then I don’t know why, but I took my friend suddenly by the arm and drew her to one side out of the path, so that we stood on the right hand, not a foot from the laurels.

‘She said nothing, and I said nothing; but I think we were both looking this way and that, as if we expected to see something.

‘The breeze died, and then sprang up again, but it was only a breath. I could hear the living leaves rustling overhead, and the dead leaves underfoot; and it was blowing gently from the churchyard.

‘Then I saw a thing that one often sees; but I could not take my

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‘Then I saw a thing that one often sees; but I could not take my

eyes off it, nor could she. It was a little column of leaves, twisting and turning and dropping and picking up again in the wind, coming slowly up the path. It was a capricious sort of draught, for the little scurry of leaves went this way and that, to and fro across the path. It came up to us, and I could feel the breeze on my hands and face. One leaf struck me softly on the cheek, and I can only say that I shuddered as if it had been a toad. Then it passed on.

'You understand, gentlemen, it was pretty dark; but it seemed to me that the breeze died and the column of leaves—it was no more than a little twist of them—sank down at the end of the avenue.

We stood there perfectly still for a moment or two; and when I turned, she was staring straight at me, but neither of us said one word.

'We did not go up the avenue to the house. We pushed our way through the laurels, and came back by the upper garden.

'Nothing else happened; and the next morning we all went off by the eleven o'clock train.

'That is all, gentlemen.'

The Furnished Room

by O. Henry

Restless, shifting, fugacious as time itself is a certain vast bulk of the population of the red brick district of the lower West Side. Homeless, they have a hundred homes. They flit from furnished room to furnished room, transients forever—transients in abode, transients in heart and mind. They sing 'Home, Sweet Home' in ragtime; they carry their *lares et penates* in a bandbox; their vine is entwined about a picture hat; a rubber plant is their fig tree.

Hence the houses of this district, having had a thousand dwellers, should have a thousand tales to tell, mostly dull ones, no doubt; but it would be strange if there could not be found a ghost or two in the wake of all these vagrant guests.

One evening after dark a young man prowled among these crumbling red mansions, ringing their bells. At the twelfth he rested his lean

hand-baggage upon the step and wiped the dust from his hat-band and forehead. The bell sounded faint and far away in some remote, hollow depths.

To the door of this, the twelfth house whose bell he had rung, came a housekeeper who made him think of an unwholesome, surfeited worm that had eaten its nut to a hollow shell and now sought to fill the vacancy with edible lodgers.

He asked if there was a room to let.

'Come in,' said the housekeeper. Her voice came from her throat; her throat seemed lined with fur. 'I have the third-floor back, vacant since a week back. Should you wish to look at it?'

The young man followed her up the stairs. A faint light from no particular source mitigated the shadows of the halls. They trod noiselessly upon a stair carpet that its own loom would have forsworn. It seemed to have become vegetable, to have degenerated in that rank, sunless air to lush lichen or spreading moss that grew in patches to the staircase and was viscid under the foot like organic matter. At each turn of the stairs were vacant niches in the wall. Perhaps plants had once been set within them. If so they had died in that foul and tainted air. It may be that statues of the saints had stood there, but it was not difficult to conceive that imps and devils had dragged them forth in the darkness and down to the unholy depths of some furnished pit below.

'This is the room,' said the housekeeper, from her furry throat. 'It's a nice room. It ain't often vacant. I had some most elegant people in it last summer—no trouble at all, and paid in advance to the minute. The water's at the end of the hall. Sprowls and Mooney kept it three months. They done a vaudeville sketch. Miss B'retta Sprowls—you may have heard of her—Oh, that was just the stage names—right there over the dresser is where the marriage certificate hung, framed. The gas is here, and you see there is plenty of closet room. It's a room everybody likes. It never stays idle long.'

'Do you have many theatrical people rooming here?' asked the young man.

'They comes and goes. A good proportion of my lodgers is connected with the theatres. Yes, sir, this is the theatrical district. Actor people never stays long anywhere. I get my share. Yes, they comes and they goes.'

He engaged the room, paying for a week in advance. He was tired, he said, and would take possession at once. He counted out the money. The room had been made ready, she said, even to towels and water. As the housekeeper moved away he put, for the thousandth time, the question that he carried at the end of his tongue.

‘A young girl—Miss Vashner—Miss Eloise Vashner—do you remember such a one among your lodgers? She would be singing on the stage, most likely. A fair girl, of medium height, and slender, with reddish, gold hair and a dark mole near her left eyebrow.’

‘No, I don’t remember the name. Them stage people has names they change as often as their rooms. They comes and they goes. No, I don’t call that one to mind.’

No. Always no. Five months of ceaseless interrogation and the inevitable negative. So much time spent by day in questioning managers, agents, schools and choruses; by night among the audiences of theatres from all-star casts down to music halls so low that he dreaded to find what he most hoped for. He who had loved her best had tried to find her. He was sure that since her disappearance from home this great, water-girt city held her somewhere, but it was like a monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of today buried tomorrow in ooze and slime.

The furnished room received its latest guest with a first glow of pseudo-hospitality, a hectic, haggard, perfunctory welcome like the specious smile of a demirep. The sophisticated comfort came in reflected gleams from the decayed furniture, the ragged brocade upholstery of a couch and two chairs, a foot-wide cheap pier glass between the two windows, from one or two gilt picture frames and a brass bedstead in a corner.

The guest reclined, inert, upon a chair, while the room, confused in speech as though it were an apartment in Babel, tried to discourse to him of its divers tenantry.

A polychromatic rug like some brilliant-flowered rectangular, tropical islet lay surrounded by a billowy sea of soiled matting. Upon the gay-papered wall were those pictures that pursue the homeless one from house to house—*The Huguenot Lovers*, *The First Quarrel*, *The Wedding Breakfast*, *Psyche at the Fountain*. The mantel’s chastely severe outline was ingloriously veiled behind some pert drapery drawn rakishly askew like the sashes of the Amazonian ballet. Upon it was some desolate flotsam cast aside by the room’s marooned when a lucky sail had borne them to a fresh port—a trifling vase or two, pictures of actresses, a medicine bottle, some stray cards out of a deck.

One by one, as the characters of a cryptograph become explicit, the little signs left by the furnished room’s procession of guests developed a significance. The threadbare space in the rug in front of the dresser told that lovely women had marched in the throng. Tiny finger prints on the wall spoke of little prisoners trying to feel their way to sun and air. A splattered stain, raying like a shadow of a bursting bomb, wit-

nessed where a hurled glass or bottle had splintered with its contents against the wall. Across the pier glass had been scrawled with a diamond in staggering letters the name 'Marie'. It seemed that the succession of dwellers in the furnished room had turned in fury—perhaps tempted beyond forbearance by its garish coldness—and wreaked upon it their passions. The furniture was chipped and bruised, the couch distorted by bursting springs, seemed a horrible monster that had been slain during the stress of some grotesque convulsion. Some more potent upheaval had cloven a great slice from the marble mantel. Each plank in the floor owned its particular cant and shriek as from a separate and individual agony. It seemed incredible that all this malice and injury had been wrought upon the room by those who had called it for a time their home; and yet it may have been the cheated home instinct surviving blindly, the resentful rage at false household gods that had kindled their wrath. A hut that is our own we can sweep and adorn and cherish.

The young tenant in the chair allowed these thoughts to file, soft-shod, through his mind, while there drifted into the room furnished sounds and furnished scents. He heard in one room a tittering and incontinent, slack laughter; in others the monologue of a scold, the rattling of dice, a lullaby, and one crying dully; above him a banjo tinkled with spirit. Doors banged somewhere, the elevated trains roared intermittently; a cat yowled miserably upon a back fence. And he breathed the breath of the house—a dank savour rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults mingled with the reeking exhalations of linoleum and mildewed and rotten wood-work.

Then, suddenly, as he rested there, the room was filled with the strong, sweet odour of mignonette. It came as upon a single buffet of wind with such sureness and fragrance and emphasis that it almost seemed a living visitant. And the man cried aloud: 'What, dear?' as if he had been called, and sprang up and faced about. The rich odour clung to him and wrapped him around. He reached out his arms for it, all his senses for the time confused and commingled. How could one be peremptorily called by an odour? Surely it must have been a sound. But, was it not the sound that had touched, that had caressed him?

'She has been in this room,' he cried, and he sprang to wrest from it a token, for he knew he would recognize the smallest thing that had belonged to her or that she had touched. This enveloping scent of mignonette, the odour that she had loved and made her own—whence came it?

The room had been but carelessly set in order. Scattered upon the

nessed where a hurled glass or bottle had splintered with its contents against the wall. Across the pier glass had been scrawled with a diamond in staggering letters the name 'Marie'. It seemed that the succession of dwellers in the furnished room had turned in fury—perhaps tempted beyond forbearance by its garish coldness—and wreaked upon it their passions. The furniture was chipped and bruised; the couch, distorted by bursting springs, seemed a horrible monster that had been slain during the stress of some grotesque convulsion. Some more potent upheaval had cloven a great slice from the marble mantel. Each plank in the floor owned its particular cant and shriek as from a separate and individual agony. It seemed incredible that all this malice and injury had been wrought upon the room by those who had called it for a time their home; and yet it may have been the cheated home instinct surviving blindly, the resentful rage at false household gods that had kindled their wrath. A hut that is our own we can sweep and adorn and cherish.

The young tenant in the chair allowed these thoughts to file, soft-shod, through his mind, while there drifted into the room furnished sounds and furnished scents. He heard in one room a tittering and incontinent, slack laughter; in others the monologue of a scold, the rattling of dice, a lullaby, and one crying dully; above him a banjo tinkled with spirit. Doors banged somewhere, the elevated trains roared intermittently; a cat yowled miserably upon a back fence. And he breathed the breath of the house—a dank savour rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults mingled with the reeking exhalations of linoleum and mildewed and rotten wood-work.

Then, suddenly, as he rested there, the room was filled with the strong, sweet odour of mignonette. It came as upon a single buffet of wind with such sureness and fragrance and emphasis that it almost seemed a living visitant. And the man cried aloud: 'What, dear?' as if he had been called, and sprang up and faced about. The rich odour clung to him and wrapped him around. He reached out his arms for it, all his senses for the time confused and commingled. How could one be peremptorily called by an odour? Surely it must have been a sound. But, was it not the sound that had touched, that had caressed him?

'She has been in this room,' he cried, and he sprang to wrest from it a token, for he knew he would recognize the smallest thing that had belonged to her or that she had touched. This enveloping scent of mignonette, the odour that she had loved and made her own—whence came it?

The room had been but carelessly set in order. Scattered upon the

flimsy dresser scarf were half a dozen hairpins—those discreet, indistinguishable friends of womankind, feminine of gender, infinite of mood and uncommunicative of tense. These he ignored, conscious of their triumphant lack of identity. Ransacking the drawers of the dresser he came upon a discarded, tiny, ragged handkerchief. He pressed it to his face. It was racy and insolent with heliotrope; he hurled it to the floor. In another drawer he found odd buttons, a theatre programme, a pawnbroker's card, two lost marshmallows, a book on the divination of dreams. In the last was a woman's black satin hair-bow, which halted him, poised between ice and fire. But the black satin hair-bow also is femininity's demure, impersonal, common ornament, and tells no tales.

And then he traversed the room like a hound on the scent, skimming the walls, considering the corners of the bulging matting on his hands and knees, rummaging mantel and tables, the curtains and hangings, the drunken cabinet in the corner, for a visible sign, unable to perceive that she was there beside, around, against, within, above him, clinging to him, wooing him, calling him so poignantly through the finer senses that even his grosser ones became cognisant of the call. Once again he answered loudly: 'Yes dear!' and turned, wild-eyed, to gaze on vacancy, for he could not yet discern form and colour and love and outstretched arms in the odour of mignonette. Oh, God! whence that odour, and since when have odours had a voice to call? Thus he groped.

He burrowed in crevices and corners, and found corks and cigarettes. These he passed in passive contempt. But once he found in a fold of the matting a half-smoked cigar, and this he ground beneath his heel with a green and trenchant oath. He sifted the room from end to end. He found dreary and ignoble small records of many a peripatetic tenant; but of her whom he sought, and who may have lodged there, and whose spirit seemed to hover there, he found no trace.

And then he thought of the housekeeper.

He ran from the haunted room downstairs and to a door that showed a crack of light. She came out to his knock. He smothered his excitement as best he could.

'Will you tell me, madam,' he besought her, 'who occupied the room I have before I came?'

'Yes, sir. I can tell you again. 'Twas Sprowls and Mooney, as I said. Miss B'retta Sprowls it was in the theatres, but Missis Mooney she was. My house is well known for respectability. The marriage certificate hung, framed, on a nail over—'

'What kind of a lady was Miss Sprowls—in looks, I mean?'

‘Why, black-haired, sir, short, and stout, with a comical face. They left a week ago Tuesday.’

‘And before they occupied it?’

‘Why, there was a single gentleman connected with the draying business. He left owing me a week. Before him was Missis Crowder and her two children, they stayed four months; and back of them was old Mr Doyle, whose sons paid for him. He kept the room six months. That goes back a year, sir, and further I do not remember.’

He thanked her and crept back to his room. The room was dead. The essence that had vivified it was gone. The perfume of mignonette had departed. In its place was the old, stale odour of mouldy house furniture, of atmosphere in storage.

The ebbing of his hope drained his faith. He sat staring at the yellow, singing gaslight. Soon he walked to the bed and began to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drove them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. When all was snug and taut he turned out the light, turned the gas full on again and laid himself gratefully upon the bed.

It was Mrs McCool’s night to go with the can for beer. So she fetched it and sat with Mrs Purdy in one of those subterranean retreats where housekeepers forgather and the worm dieth seldom.

‘I rented out my third floor, back, this evening,’ said Mrs Purdy, across a fine circle of foam. ‘A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago.’

‘Now, did ye, Missis Purdy, ma’am?’ said Mrs McCool, with intense admiration. ‘You do be a wonder for rentin’ rooms of that kind. And did ye tell him, then?’ she concluded in a husky whisper, laden with mystery.

‘Rooms,’ said Mrs Purdy, in her furriest tones, ‘are furnished for to rent. I did not tell him, Mrs McCool.’

‘’Tis right ye are, ma’am; ’tis by renting rooms we kape alive. Ye have the rale sense for business, ma’am. There be many people will rayjict the rentin’ of a room if they be tould a suicide has been after dyin’ in the bed of it.’

‘As you say, we has our living to be making,’ remarked Mrs Purdy.

‘Yis, ma’am, ’tis true. ’Tis just one wake ago this day I helped ye lay out the third floor, back. A pretty slip of a colleen she was to be killin’ herself wid the gas—a swate little face she had, Mrs Purdy, ma’am.’

‘She’d a-been called handsome, as you say,’ said Mrs Purdy, assenting but critical, ‘but for that mole she had a-growin’ by her left eyebrow. Do fill up your glass again, Missis McCool.’

The Garret of Madame Lemoine

by W. K. Mashburn, Jr.

When Merriweather's idea took definite shape, Annette refused to have anything to do with it. A haunted house was a haunted house, as far as she was concerned. Yet she was really the cause of all that happened. The innocent cause, of course; but she suggested the thing to Merriweather.

Merriweather wanted to scare his wife, just for the sake of upsetting her poise. That wasn't really as cruel as it sounds, because Janice was a calm, blond Juno, whose eternal self-possession would at times have irked a more reasonable man than her husband. He had had some very vague idea when the pair of them first started for New Orleans to spend the carnival season with Walter and Annette Owen. There would be masks, an Old World atmosphere, and an altogether proper stage setting to make the possibility promising.

The Monday morning before the Mardi Gras Day, the quartet rode through the *Vieux Carré*—the "Old Quarter"—in Owen's car, visiting every spot that was likely to interest the Merriweathers. Annette made a perfect guide: she was of the Quarter herself, and she knew its every legend and historic spot as well as she knew the beads of her amber rosary. As all must do who tour the Quarter with competent guides, they came eventually to the "haunted" house.

Like so many of the old buildings of that section, the house had, of later years, seen mostly the seamy side of life. Just now, it was desolate and unoccupied. Somebody had recently bought it—a Sicilian, rumor had it—and there was much talk of raising a fund to preserve the place to its traditions, while the Vieux Carré Historical Society passed the usual resolution of protest against the desecration of an old landmark. That was all it amounted to, and it was not the fault of any of the protestants that the old house escaped the ignominious fate of becoming a spaghetti factory. Annette said, later, that the legend saved it. That may be so, too, but the Sicilian probably abandoned the place to the Historical Society because of the Merriweathers, and nobody associated them with the legend. Nobody, that is, except the Owens.

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On this particular morning, there was an old crone, maybe one of the Sicilian's dependents, possibly just an opportunist, taking advantage of the influx of carnival visitors to charge an admittance fee of twenty-five cents to everyone who wanted a peek at Madame Lemoyne's garret. Annette led the way up, and told the story to the Merriweathers, standing there in the attic's legend-haunted gloom.

"Nearly a hundred years ago," she informed them, "this house was occupied by a Madame Lemoyne. There was a Monsieur Lemoyne, too, but he doesn't seem to have amounted to anything more than Madame's husband, so it is still known as Madame Lemoyne's house.

"This Madame Lemoyne was a Parisian of wealth and excellent family, so that her house became a gathering place for the élite of that day. Everyone agreed that Madame was a most charming woman, a brilliant hostess, and thoroughly worth cultivating. None suspected her of being the human fiend she was, nor dreamed of what her garret—*this* garret!—concealed, until one day her house burned.

"It didn't burn much, because the fire brigade arrived with unusual promptness. The blaze was in the attic, and that led to the discovery of the other things up there. At last Madame's secret was out! The horrified volunteer firemen—some of them blades of her very own circle—discovered seven black slaves in chains, all of them in various stages of mutilation.

"The charming *Parisienne* had maintained a private torture chamber, where she gratified her secret lust for cruelty upon the bodies of shackled and helpless negro slaves. All the details were never given out, but you can imagine them to have been horrible from the fact that one of the pitiful victims, a woman, somehow obtained the means to fire the garret, in the hope of ending, in the flames, her torment at Madame's beautiful white hands."

Annette paused to give her story dramatic effect, and Janice Merriweather made a slight grimace of distaste. Her husband, watching her, laughed at even so slight a ruffling of her calm; and Annette's climax fell rather flat as a result.

"What happened to the old girl herself?" Merriweather then wanted to know.

"Luckily for her, she was away from home when the fire broke out," Annette answered. "Very luckily," she continued, "for a mob soon formed and set about finding her, and Madame barely made her way aboard a French ship that was just then in the act of clearing port. She spent the rest of her life in Paris, and report had it that she became very noted for her piety and charity, and died at a ripe old age."

"So prosper the wicked," sententiously pronounced Merriweather. "But you have yet to tell us why the place is supposed to be haunted."

"Ah!" Annette enlightened. "The slaves. They are said still to haunt this old attic, hoping that Madame may some day come back."

"Hoping that she may come back?" echoed Merriweather, with a show of interest. "Then that means hoping for a chance for revenge?"

Annette nodded. "Surely. There was one horribly mutilated giant of a black, so the story goes, whose tongue had been torn out with pincers, and who refused to leave his torture-chamber after they had taken the chains off him. He made people understand that he wanted to wait for Madame's return; and, as his unshackled hands and arms were unmaimed, and of enormous size and strength, he resisted all efforts to move him so savagely that they left him there until he died, a few days later."

"I don't blame them," volunteered Walter Owen. "I've seen buck niggers working on the wharves with arms as big as my thighs, and knotted with muscles until they looked like the limbs of an oak."

"Well, I don't suppose ghost arms could do much harm, regardless of how tremendously they were thewed," was Janice's practical observation.

"Oh, but they could in this case," Annette quickly corrected. "You see, if they are able to stay on earth at all, spirits seeking vengeance on their murderers have the power to embody themselves momentarily, under the right circumstances, and on the scene of the crime. That's what the old mammies say, I mean."

Janice laughed a little, indulgently. "I'm almost inclined to suspect that you half believe all that, yourself," she gently scoffed.

Annette retorted, in a flash, "Would *you* come up here, alone, at midnight?"

"Oh, come," interrupted Owen. "None of us believe that part of it, of course. But it would be sort of creepy up here, at that time of night. Right now, it's just stuffy: let's get down to the car, and out into the sunshine."

With that, they went down to the street, but Annette decided, on the way, that she didn't wonder that Janice's calm superiority irritated her husband.

Merriweather was not content to let the subject drop. Next day he brought it up again. "You *wouldn't* go up alone into that haunted attic at midnight, would you?"

"Why not?" Janice coolly demanded.

"Would you?" insisted her husband.

"Certainly," replied Janice, "if there were any reason for it."

"I *dare* you—tonight!" challenged Merriweather.

Janice laughed, tolerantly. "Did you ever before see such persistence on a foolish subject?" she asked the Owens. Then, with the slightest of shrugs, she answered her husband. "Very well, since you are so set on it. After the ball, tonight."

"Bully for you!" Merriweather applauded. He seemed delighted with her decision.

"Oh!" Annette uneasily objected. "I wouldn't, if I were you."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I just don't like it. You know, you're going to wear a costume that is just the sort of dress Madame Lemoyne might have worn in her day."

"Meaning—?" suggested Janice.

"Nothing!" decided Annette, rather flatly. "You-all go if you will, but I shall not." If Pontius Pilate had been a Louisiana Creole, he would have disavowed responsibility with just such a shrug of his shoulders as she used.

At a little after a quarter of midnight, Merriweather sought out Owen in the crowd of revelers at the Mardi Gras ball. Both were in costume, and masked, but each was, of course, acquainted with the other's disguise; so that finding him was no great matter. Owen, in fact, was also searching for Merriweather, and anticipated the latter's question when they met. "The ladies have already gone out to the car," he stated. "It's a couple of blocks down the street and, as I didn't know how long it would take to find you, I sent them on to save time."

"Good!" approved Merriweather. "So Annette decided to go, after all?"

Owen nodded. "Yes; Janice persuaded her that it was just a harmless lark."

"Good!" Merriweather said again. "Now listen: I'm not going with you. You tell 'em you couldn't find me and that I told you beforehand that I'd follow in a taxi, if you went off and left me. I want to beat you down there," he went on, in explanation, "and be in the garret when Janice climbs up. I'll scare her out of her calm, for once!"

Owen remonstrated, but Merriweather cut him short. "I know I wouldn't do for Annette—she'd have double hysterics, and so would any normal woman. Not Janice! I may hand her a jolt, but it won't be a very big one."

Merriweather had become detached from the others, earlier in the

night, and it was evident to Owen that he had found a bootlegger in the interval, and, more or less, taken a doubtful advantage of his discovery. Owen realized, moreover, that Merriweather's determination to shatter his wife's irritatingly cool self-possession had become something of an obsession with the man, even without the whisky.

"Go ahead," urged Merriweather. "I *am* going in a taxi—I have one waiting. The door to the stairs will be open: I fixed it with that old hag this afternoon."

With that, he was off, and Owen went out to repeat his lame story to the women.

Janice smiled. "I know quite well what he plans," she remarked, "but I think he'll be disappointed."

Owen said nothing as he started the car toward the Old Quarter, but he, as Annette had already done, reached the decision that a woman so eternally poised was a phenomenon to set the nerves of any man on edge.

Arrived at Madame Lemoyne's house, Walter tried the stair door, and found it unlocked, as Merriweather had said it would be.

"Well," he said, consulting his watch, "let's go up; it doesn't lack a full minute of midnight."

"I am going alone," Janice reminded him. "That was the bargain."

Without more ado she slipped past, and climbed lightly and quickly up the first flight of stairs. Walter looked at Annette in some hesitation. "She didn't even take the flashlight," he remarked. "Hadn't we better follow her?"

"Let her go!" Annette had not forgotten her own contribution to Janice's amusement on their previous visit to the house, and so was inclined to be a bit catty. (She was not anxious to climb those stairs, anyway!) She swiftly became contrite, however, and as swiftly reversed her decision. "No, I didn't mean that! Let's go!"

They climbed the first flight of stairs, listening for Janice's footfall above them; but the house was as oppressively silent as a country churchyard. Acting upon some impulse, Annette grasped Walter's coat sleeve as they started up the second and final flight of stairs to the garret.

"Hurry!" she whispered.

At that instant, a clock somewhere commenced to strike the midnight hour. Instinctively, Walter paused upon the stairs, and Annette drew closer to him, while the twelve strokes rang out dolorously upon the still night. For no apparent reason they were holding their breaths when the last stroke died out. The quiet was more noticeable than

ever, and it seemed that an electric tension had been added to the air. Then—

“Oh!” moaned Annette, clutching frantically at her husband. “I knew it! Oh-h!”

Heedless of her grasping hands, Owen sprang up the stairway, in answer to the agony-laden screams that had come from the garret—screams that had stopped short with a suddenness that was even more awful.

The impetus of his last upward leap carried Walter into the attic, or else he would have stopped short to fight off the fear, terrible and mastering, that gripped him at the top of the steps. He felt his scalp prickle, and sensed the presence of *something* in the farther darkness of that black and barren garret—something terrible, something huge, and black, and utterly malignant.

Dimly conscious of it, he could hear Annette wailing, upon the stairs below him. Ahead, in the thick, almost tangible darkness, there sounded a mouthy, incoherent babble, like unto the gibbering of a soul lost in the dismal wastes between worlds. That, and the *something*—

Suddenly Owen realized that he had, in his last headlong upward flight, instinctively snapped the switch of his powerful electric torch—snapped it *off*. Click! it went on again. Did he but imagine that a towering shape, blacker than mere darkness, shrank away and melted under the sudden powerful ray of light? A flood of relief and fresh assurance swept over Walter as the white beam leaped forward.

His relief was short-lived! In the light of the torch, Owen beheld a twisted and oddly terrifying heap upon the dusty boards of the attic. Janice! And bending over her, patting her face with hands that came away darkly stained, crouched a frantically gabbling figure, garbed in a harlequin suit.

“Merriweather!” croaked Owen; and the babbler clutched the figure from the floor to his breast, changing his awful mouthing to a whimpering snarl of defiance.

So ended Merriweather’s jest. The law would have had his life, except that the police found him raving mad, when they came and forced his arms from their pitiful embrace. Gravely, those upon whom the responsibility for such things rests constructed a theory that satisfied them and the public. From Owen’s testimony (they got nothing from Annette but shudders and sobs), they deduced that Merriweather’s obsession to break the perpetual self-control of his wife had become almost monomania; poison whisky, and his rage when he sup-

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posedly failed to frighten Janice in the garret, had supplied the final leverage to unbalance his reason. Thus his intended joke became stark tragedy, and Merriweather strangled his wife. In this wise argued the law, and was complacently satisfied when press and public docilely accepted its theory.

As for Walter Owen and Annette his wife, they had their doubts. They kept them, wisely, to themselves, but they had them, none the less. For Owen had seen that huddled heap crumpled upon the floor of Madame Lemoyne's garret—garbed much as Madame might have been!—and had observed that the great marks upon her white neck were more, by nearly double, than Merriweather's small hands could compass. Neither did Walter believe that Merriweather's occasional irritation at his wife's disconcerting lack of feminine "temperament" had become anything like an obsession that finally snapped his reason. Instead, Owen remembered his own almost overpowering fear of the *something* in the attic, that he had only sensed. Suppose Merriweather *saw*—came to grips with—*It*!

One thing more—one detail the coroner, in all propriety, suppressed: *Janice Merriweather's tongue had been torn from her mouth by the roots!*

The Ghost and the Bone-Setter

by J. Sheridan Le Fanu

In looking over the papers of my late valued and respected friend, Francis Purcell, who for nearly fifty years discharged the arduous duties of a parish priest in the south of Ireland, I met with the following document. It is one of many such, for he was a curious and industrious collector of old local traditions—a commodity in which the quarter where he resided mightily abounded. The collection and arrangement of such legends was, as long as I can remember him, his *hobby*; but I had never learned that his love of the marvellous and whimsical had

carried him so far as to prompt him to commit the results of his enquiries to writing, until, in the character of *residuary legatee*, his will put me in possession of all his manuscript papers. To such as may think the composing of such productions as these inconsistent with the character and habits of a country priest, it is necessary to observe, that there did exist a race of priests—those of the old school, a race now nearly extinct—whose habits were from many causes more refined, and whose tastes more literary than are those of the alumni of Maynooth.

It is perhaps necessary to add that the superstition illustrated by the following story, namely, that the corpse last buried is obliged, during his juniority of interment, to supply his brother tenants of the churchyard in which he lies, with fresh water to allay the burning thirst of purgatory, is prevalent throughout the south of Ireland. The writer can vouch for a case in which a respectable and wealthy farmer, on the borders of Tipperary, in tenderness to the corns of his departed help-mate, enclosed in her coffin two pair of brogues, a light and a heavy, the one for dry, the other for sloppy weather; seeking thus to mitigate the fatigues of her inevitable perambulations in procuring water, and administering it to the thirsty souls of purgatory. Fierce and desperate conflicts have ensued in the case of two funeral parties approaching the same churchyard together, each endeavouring to secure to his own dead priority of sepulture, and a consequent immunity from the tax levied upon the pedestrian powers of the last comer. An instance not long since occurred, in which one of two such parties, through fear of losing to their deceased friend this inestimable advantage, made their way to the churchyard by a *short cut*, and in violation of one of their strongest prejudices, actually threw the coffin over the wall, lest time should be lost in making their entrance through the gate. Innumerable instances of the same kind might be quoted, all tending to shew how strongly, among the peasantry of the south, this superstition is entertained. However, I shall not detain the reader further, by any prefatory remarks, but shall proceed to lay before him the following:—

*Extract from the Ms. Papers of the Late
Rev. Francis Purcell, of Drumcoolagh*

“I tell the following particulars, as nearly as I can recollect them, in the words of the narrator. It may be necessary to observe that he was what is termed a *well-spoken* man, having for a considerable time instructed the ingenious youth of his native parish in such of the liberal arts and sciences as he found it convenient to profess—a circumstance which may account for the occurrence of several big words, in the course of

this narrative, more distinguished for euphonious effect, than for correctness of application. I proceed then, without further preface, to lay before you the wonderful adventures of Terry Neil."

"Why, thin, 'tis a quare story, an' as thrue as you're sittin' there; and I'd make bould to say there isn't a boy in the seven parishes could tell it better nor crickther than myself, for 'twas my father himself it happened to, an' many's the time I heerd it out iv his own mouth; an' I can say, an' I'm proud av that same, my father's word was as incredible as any squire's oath in the counthry; and so signs an' if a poor man got into any unlucky throuble, he was the boy id go into the court an' prove; but that dosen't signify—he was as honest and as sober a man, barrin' he was a little bit too partial to the glass, as you'd find in a day's walk; an' there wasn't the likes of him in the counthry round for nate labourin' an' *baan* diggin'; and he was mighty handy entirely for carpenter's work, and mendin' ould spudethrees, an' the likes i' that. An' so he tuck up with bone-setting, as was most nathural, for none of them could come up to him in mendin' the leg iv a stool or a table; an' sure, there never was a bone-setter got so much custom—man an' child, young an' ould—there never was such breakin' and mendin' of bones known in the memory of man. Well, Terry Neil, for that was my father's name, began to feel his heart growin' light and his purse heavy; an' he took a bit iv a farm in Squire Phelim's ground, just undher the ould castle, an' a pleasant little spot it was; an' day an' mornin', poor crathurs not able to put a foot to the ground, with broken arms and broken legs, id be comin' ramblin' in from all quarters to have their bones spliced up. Well, yer honour, all this was as well as well could be; but it was customary when Sir Phelim id go any where out iv the country, for some iv the tinants to sit up to watch in the ould castle, just for a kind of a compliment to the ould family—an' a mighty unpleasant compliment it was for the tinants, for there wasn't a man of them but knew there was some thing quare about the ould castle. The neighbours had it, that the squire's ould grandfather, as good a gentleman, God be with him, as I heer'd as ever stood in shoe leather, used to keep walkin' about in the middle iv the night, ever sinst he bursted a blood vessel pullin' out a cork out iv a bottle, as you or I might be doin', and will too, plase God; but that dosen't signify. So, as I was sayin', the ould squire used to come down out of the frame, where his picthur was hung up, and to brake the bottles and glasses, God be marciful to us all, an' dhrink all he could come at—an' small blame to him for that same; and then if any of the family id be comin' in, he id be up again in his place, looking as quite an' innocent as if he didn't know any thing about it—the mischievous ould chap.

“Well, your honour, as I was sayin’, one time the family up at the castle was stayin’ in Dublin for a week or two; and so as usual, some of the tenants had to sit up in the castle, and the third night it kem to my father’s turn. ‘Oh, tare an ouns,’ says he unto himself, ‘an’ must I sit up all night, and that ould vagabond of a sperit, glory be to God,’ says he, ‘serenading through the house, an’ doin’ all sorts iv mischief.’ However, there was no gettin’ aff, and so he put a bould face on it, an’ he went up at night-fall with a bottle of pottieen, and another of holy wather.

“It was rainin’ smart enough, an’ the evenin’ was darksome and gloomy, when my father got in, and the holy wather he sprinkled on himself, it wasn’t long till he had to swallee a cup iv the pottieen, to keep the cowl’d out iv his heart. It was the ould steward, Lawrence Connor, that opened the door—and he an’ my father wor always very great. So when he seen who it was, an’ my father tould him how it was his turn to watch in the castle, he offered to sit up along with him; and you may be sure my father wasn’t sorry for that same. So says Larry,

“‘We’ll have a bit iv fire in the parlour,’ says he.

“‘An’ why not in the hall?’ says my father, for he knew that the squire’s picthur was hung in the parlour.

“‘No fire can be lit in the hall,’ says Lawrence, ‘for there’s an ould jackdaw’s nest in the chimney.’

“‘Oh thin,’ says my father, ‘let us stop in the kitchen, for it’s very umproper for the likes iv me to be sittin’ in the parlour,’ says he.

“‘Oh, Terry, that can’t be,’ says Lawrence; ‘if we keep up the ould custom at all, we may as well keep it up properly,’ says he.

“‘Divil sweep the ould custom,’ says my father—to himself, do ye mind, for he didn’t like to let Lawrence see that he was more afeard himself.

“‘Oh, very well,’ says he. ‘I’m agreeable, Lawrence,’ says he; and so down they both went to the kitchen, until the fire id be lit in the parlour—an’ that same wasn’t long doin’.

“Well, your honour, they soon wint up again, an’ sat down mighty comfortable by the parlour fire, and they beginn’d to talk, an’ to smoke, an’ to dhrink a small taste iv the pottieen; and, moreover, they had a good rousing fire of bogwood and turf, to warm their shins over.

“Well, sir, as I was sayin’ they kep convarsin’ and smokin’ together most agreeable, until Lawrence beginn’d to get sleepy, as was but nathural for him, for he was an ould sarvint man, and was used to a great dale iv sleep.

“‘Sure it’s impossible,’ says my father, ‘it’s gettin’ sleepy you are?’

“‘Oh, divil a taste,’ says Larry, ‘I’m only shuttin’ my eyes,’ says he,

“Well, your honour, as I was sayin’, one time the family up at the castle was stayin’ in Dublin for a week or two; and so as usual, some of the tenants had to sit up in the castle, and the third night it kem to my father’s turn. ‘Oh, tare an ouns,’ says he unto himself, ‘an’ must I sit up all night, and that ould vagabond of a sperit, glory be to God,’ says he, ‘serenading through the house, an’ doin’ all sorts iv mischief.’ However, there was no gettin’ aff, and so he put a bould face on it, an’ he went up at night-fall with a bottle of pottieen, and another of holy wather.

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‘to keep out the parfume of the tibacky smoke, that’s makin’ them wather,’ says he. ‘So don’t you mind other people’s business,’ says he stiff enough (for he had a mighty high stomach av his own, rest his sowl), ‘and go on,’ says he, ‘with your story, for I’m listenin’,’ says he, shuttin’ down his eyes.

“Well, when my father seen spakin’ was no use, he went on with his story. —By the same token, it was the story of Jim Soolivan and his ould goat he was tellin’—an’ a pleasant story it is—an’ there was so much divarsion in it, that it was enough to waken a dormouse, let alone to pervint a Christian goin’ asleep. But, faix, the way my father tould it, I believe there never was the likes heerd sinst nor before for he bawled out every word av it, as if the life was fairly leavin’ him thrying to keep ould Larry awake; but, faix, it was no use, for the hoorsness came an him, an’ before he kem to the end of his story, Larry O’Connor began to snore like a bagpipes.

“‘Oh, blur an’ agres,’ says my father, ‘isn’t this a hard case,’ says he, ‘that ould villain, lettin’ on to be my friend, and to go asleep this way, an’ us both in the very room with a sperit,’ says he. ‘The crass o’ Christ about us,’ says he; and with that he was goin’ to shake Lawrence to waken him, but he just remimbered if he roused him, that he’d surely go off to his bed, an’ lave him completely alone, an’ that id be by far worse.

“‘Oh thin,’ says my father, ‘I’ll not disturb the poor boy. It id be neither friendly nor good-nathured,’ says he, ‘to tormint him while he is asleep,’ says he; ‘only I wish I was the same way myself,’ says he.

‘An’ with that he began to walk up an’ down, an’ sayin’ his prayers, until he worked himself into a sweat, savin’ your presence. But it was all no good; so he dhrunk about a pint of sperits, to compose his mind.

“‘Oh,’ says he, ‘I wish to the Lord I was as asy in my mind as Larry there. Maybe,’ says he, ‘if I thried I could go asleep’; an’ with that he pulled a big arm-chair close beside Lawrence, an’ settled himself in it as well as he could.

“But there was one quare thing I forgot to tell you. He couldn’t help, in spite av himself, lookin’ now an’ thin at the picthur, an’ he immediately observed that the eyes av it was follyin’ him about, an’ starin’ at him, an’ winkin’ at him, wherever he wint. ‘Oh,’ says he, when he seen that, ‘it’s a poor chance I have,’ says he; ‘an’ bad luck was with me the day I kem into this unforthunate place,’ says he; ‘but any way there’s no use in bein’ freckened now,’ says he; ‘for if I am to die, I may as well parspire undaunted,’ says he.

“Well, your honour, he thried to keep himself quite an’ asy, an’ he

thought two or three times he might have wint asleep, but for the way the storm was groanin' and creekin' through the great heavy branches outside, an' whistlin' through the ould chimnies iv the castle. Well, afther one great roarin' blast iv the wind, you'd think the walls iv the castle was just goin' to fall, quite an' clane, with the shakin' iv it. All av a suddint the storm stopt, as silent an' as quite as if it was a July evenin'. Well, your honour, it wasn't stopped blowin' for three minnites, before he thought he hard a sort iv a noise over the chimney-piece; an' with that my father just opened his eyes the smallest taste in life, an' sure enough he seen the ould squire gettin' out iv the picthur, for all the world as if he was throwin' aff his ridin' coat, until he stept out clane an' complate, out av the chimly-piece, an' thrun himself down an' the floor. Well, the slieveen ould chap—an' my father thought it was the dirtiest turn iv all—before he beganned to do anything out iv the way, he stopped, for a while, to listen wor they both asleep; an' as soon as he thought all was quite, he put out his hand, and tuck hould iv the whiskey bottle, an' dhrank at laste a pint iv it. Well, your honour, when he tuck his turn out iv it, he settled it back mighty cute intirely, in the very same spot it was in before. An' he beginn'd to walk up an' down the room, lookin' as sober an' as solid as if he never done the likes at all. An' whinever he went apast my father, he thought he felt a great scent of brimstone, an' it was that that freckened him entirely; for he knew it was brimstone that was burned in hell, savin' your presence. At any rate, he often heer'd it from Father Murphy, an' he had a right to know what belonged to it—he's dead since, God rest him. Well, your honour, my father was asy enough until the sperit kem past him; so close, God be marcifal to us all, that the smell iv the sulphur tuck the breath clane out iv him; an' with that he tuck such a fit iv coughin', that it al-a-most shuck him out iv the chair he was sittin' in.

“ ‘Ho, ho!’ says the squire, stoppin' short about two steps aff, and turnin' round facin' my father, ‘is it you that's in it?—an' how's all with you, Terry Neil?’

“ ‘At your honour's sarvice,’ says my father (as well as the fright id let him, for he was more dead than alive), ‘an' it's proud I am to see your honour to-night,’ says he.

“ ‘Terence,’ says the squire, ‘you're a respectable man (an' it was thrue for him), an' industrious, sober man, an' an example of inebriety to the whole parish,’ says he.

“ ‘Thank your honour,’ says my father, gettin' courage, ‘you were always a civil spoken gentleman, God rest your honour.’

“ ‘Rest my honour,’ says the sperit (fairly gettin' red in the face with

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“‘Rest my honour,’ says the sperit (fairly gettin' red in the face with

the madness), 'Rest my honour?' says he. 'Why, you ignorant spalpeen,' says he, 'you mane, niggardly ignoramus,' says he, 'where did you lave your manners?' says he. 'If I *am* dead, it's no fault iv mine,' says he; 'an' it's not to be thrun in my teeth at every hand's turn, by the likes iv you,' says he, stampin' his foot an the flure, that you'd think the boords id smash undher him.

" 'Oh,' says my father, 'I'm only a foolish, ignorant, poor man,' says he.

" 'You're nothing else,' says the squire; 'but any way,' says he, 'it's not to be listenin' to your goster, nor convarsin' with the likes iv you, that I came *up*—down I mane,' says he—(an' as little as the mistake was, my father tuck notice iv it). 'Listen to me now, Terence Neil,' says he, 'I was always a good masther to Pathrick Neil, your grandfather,' says he.

" 'Tis thrue for your honour,' says my father.

" 'And, moreover, I think I was always a sober, riglar gintleman,' says the squire.

" 'That's your name, sure enough,' says my father (though it was a big lie for him, but he could not help it).

" 'Well,' says the sperit, 'although I was as sober as most men—at laste as most gentlemen'—says he; 'an' though I was at different periods a most extempory Christian, and most charitable and inhuman to the poor,' says he; 'for all that I'm not as asy where I am now,' says he, 'as I had a right to expect,' says he.

" 'An' more's the pity,' says my father; 'maybe your honour id wish to have a word with Father Murphy?'

" 'Hould your tongue, you misherable bliggard,' says the squire; 'it's not iv my sowl I'm thinkin'—an' I wondher you'd have the impitence to talk to a gintleman consarnin' his sowl;—and when I want *that* fixed,' says he, slappin' his thigh, 'I'll go to them that knows what belongs to the likes,' says he. 'It's not my sowl,' says he, sittin' down opposite my father; 'it's not my sowl that's annoyin' me most—I'm unasy on my right leg,' says he, 'that I bruck at Glenvarloch cover the day I killed black Barney.'

" (My father found out afther, it was a favourite horse that fell undher him, afther leapin' the big fince that runs along by the glen.)

" 'I hope,' says my father, 'your honour's not unasy about the killin' iv him?'

" 'Hould your tongue, ye fool,' said the squire, 'an' I'll tell you why I'm anasy an my leg,' says he. 'In the place, where I spend most iv my time,' says he, 'except the little leisure I have for lookin' about me here,' says he, 'I have to walk a great dale more than I was ever used

to,' says he, 'and by far more than is good for me either,' says he; 'for I must tell you,' says he, 'the people where I am is uncommonly fond iv could wather, for there is nothin' betther to be had; an', moreover, the weather is hotter than is altogether plisint,' says he; 'and I'm appinted,' says he, 'to assist in carryin' the wather, an' gets a mighty poor share iv it myself,' says he, 'an' a mighty throublesome, warin' job it is, I can tell you,' says he; 'for they're all iv them surprisingly dhry, an' dhrinks it as fast as my legs can carry it,' says he; 'but what kills me intirely,' says he, 'is the wakeness in my leg,' says he, 'an' I want you to give it a pull or two to bring it to shape,' says he, 'and that's the long an' the short iv it,' says he.

" 'Oh, plase your honour,' says my father (for he didn't like to handle the sperit at all), 'I wouldn't have the impitence to do the likes to your honour,' says he; 'it's only to poor crathurs like myself I'd do it to,' says he.

" 'None iv your blarney,' says the squire, 'here's my leg,' says he, cockin' it up to him, 'pull it for the bare life,' says he; 'an' if you don't, by the immortal powers I'll not lave a bone in your carcish I'll not powdher,' says he.

" 'When my father heerd that, he seen there was no use in purtendin', so he tuck hould iv the leg, an' he kept pullin' an' pullin', till the sweat, God bless us, began to pour down his face."

" 'Pull, you divil', says the squire.

" 'At your sarvice, your honour,' says my father.

" 'Pull harder,' says the squire.

" 'My father pulled like the divil.

" 'I'll take a little sup,' says the squire, rachin' over his hand to the bottle, 'to keep up my courage,' says he, lettin' an to be very wake in himself intirely. But, as cute as he was, he was out here, for he tuck the wrong one. 'Here's to your good health, Terence,' says he, 'an' now pull like the very divil,' 'an' with that he lifted the bottle of holy wather, but it was hardly to his mouth, whin he let a screech out, you'd think the room id fairly split with it, an' made one chuck that sent the leg clane aff his body in my father's hands; down wint the squire over the table, an' bang wint my father half way across the room on his back, upon the flure. Whin he kem to himself the cheerful mornin' sun was shinin' through the windy shutthers, an' he was lying flat an his back, with the leg iv one of the great ould chairs pulled clane out iv the socket an' tight in his hand, pintin' up to the ceilin', an' ould Larry fast asleep, an' snorin' as loud as ever. My father wint that mornin' to Father Murphy, an' from that to the day of his death, he never neglected confission nor mass, an' what he tould was betther believed

that he spake av it but seldom. An', as for the squire, that is the sperit, whether it was that he did not like his liquor, or by rason iv the loss iv his leg, he was never known to walk again."

A Ghost-Child

by Bernard Capes

In making this confession public, I am aware that I am giving a butterfly to be broken on a wheel. There is so much of delicacy in its subject, that the mere resolve to handle it at all might seem to imply a lack of the sensitiveness necessary to its understanding; and it is certain that the more reverent the touch, the more irresistible will figure its opportunity to the common scepticism which is bonds slave to its five senses. Moreover one cannot, in the reason of things, write to publish for Aristarchus alone; but the gauntlet of Grub Street must be run in any bid for truth and sincerity.

On the other hand, to withhold from evidence, in these days of what one may call a zetetic psychology, anything which may appear elucidatory, however exquisitely and rarely, of our spiritual relationships, must be pronounced, I think, a sin against the Holy Ghost.

All in all, therefore, I decide to give, with every passage to personal identification safeguarded, the story of a possession, or visitation, which is signified in the title to my narrative.

Tryphena was the sole orphaned representative of an obscure but gentle family which had lived for generations in the east of England. The spirit of the fens, of the long grey marshes, whose shores are the neutral ground of two elements, slumbered in her eyes. Looking into them, one seemed to see little beds of tiny green mosses luminous under water, or stirred by the movement of microscopic life in their midst. Secrets, one felt, were shadowed in their depths, too frail and sweet for understanding. The pretty love-fancy of babies seen in the eyes of maidens, was in hers to be interpreted into the very cosmic dust of sea-urchins, sparkling like chrysoberyls. Her soul looked out through them, as if they were the windows of a water-nursery.

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She was always a child among children, in heart and knowledge most innocent, until Jason came and stood in her field of vision. Then, spirit of the neutral ground as she was, inclining to earth or water with the sway of the tides, she came wondering and dripping, as it were, to land, and took up her abode for final choice among the daughters of the earth. She knew her woman's estate, in fact, and the irresistible attraction of all completed perfections to the light that burns to destroy them.

Tryphena was not only an orphan, but an heiress. Her considerable estate was administered by her guardian, Jason's father, a widower, who was possessed of this single adored child. The fruits of parental infatuation had come early to ripen on the seedling. The boy was self-willed and perverse, the more so as he was naturally of a hot-hearted disposition. Violence and remorse would sway him in alternate moods, and be made, each in its turn, a self-indulgence. He took a delight in crossing his father's wishes, and no less in atoning for his gracelessness with moving demonstrations of affection.

Foremost of the old man's most cherished projects was, very naturally, a union between the two young people. He planned, manoeuvred, spoke for it with all his heart of love and eloquence. And, indeed, it seemed at last as if his hopes were to be crowned. Jason, returning from a lengthy voyage (for his enterprising spirit had early decided for the sea, and he was a naval officer), saw, and was struck amazed before, the transformed vision of his old child-play-fellow. She was an opened flower whom he had left a green bud—a thing so rare and flawless that it seemed a sacrilege for earthly passions to converse of her. Familiarity, however, and some sense of reciprocal attraction, quickly dethroned that eucharist. Tryphena could blush, could thrill, could solicit, in the sweet ways of innocent womanhood. She loved him dearly, wholly, it was plain—had found the realisation of her old formless dreams in this wondrous birth of a desire for one, in whose new-impassioned eyes she had known herself reflected hitherto only for the most patronised of small gossips. And, for her part, fearless as nature, she made no secret of her love. She was absorbed in, a captive to, Jason from that moment and for ever.

He responded. What man, however perverse, could have resisted, on first appeal, the attraction of such beauty, the flower of a radiant soul? The two were betrothed; the old man's cup of happiness was brimmed.

Then came clouds and a cold wind, chilling the garden of Hesperis. Jason was always one of those who, possessing classic noses, will cut them off, on easy provocation, to spite their faces. He was so proudly

independent, to himself, that he resented the least assumption of proprietorship in him on the part of other people—even of those who had the best claim to his love and submission. This pride was an obsession. It stultified the real good in him, which was considerable. Apart from it, he was a good, warm-tempered fellow, hasty but affectionate. Under its dominion, he would have broken his own heart on an imaginary grievance.

He found one, it is to be supposed, in the privileges assumed by love; in its exacting claims upon him; perhaps in its little unreasoning jealousies. He distorted these into an implied conceit of authority over him on the part of an heiress who was condescending to his meaner fortunes. The suggestion was quite base and without warrant; but pride has no balance. No doubt, moreover, the rather childish self-depreciations of the old man, his father, in his attitude towards a match he had so fondly desired, helped to aggravate this feeling. The upshot was that, when within a few months of the date which was to make his union with Tryphena eternal, Jason broke away from a restraint which his pride pictured to him as intolerable, and went on a yachting expedition with a friend.

Then, at once, and with characteristic violence, came the reaction. He wrote, impetuously, frenziedly, from a distant port, claiming himself Tryphena's, and Tryphena his, for ever and ever and ever. They were man and wife before God. He had behaved like an insensate brute, and he was at that moment starting to speed to her side, to beg her forgiveness and the return of her love.

He had no need to play the suitor afresh. She had never doubted or questioned their mutual bondage, and would have died a maid for his sake. Something of sweet exultation only seemed to quicken and leap in her body, that her faith in her dear love was vindicated.

But the joy came near to upset the reason of the old man, already tottering to its dotage; and what followed destroyed it utterly.

The yacht, flying home, was lost at sea, and Jason was drowned.

I once saw Tryphena about this time. She lived with her near mindless charge, lonely, in an old grey house upon the borders of a salt mere, and had little but the unearthly cries of seabirds to answer to the questions of her widowed heart. She worked, sweet in charity, among the marsh folk, a beautiful unearthly presence; and was especially to be found where infants and the troubles of child-bearing women called for her help and sympathy. She was a wife herself, she would say quaintly; and some day perhaps, by grace of the good spirits of the sea, would be a mother. None thought to cross her statement, put with so sweet a sanity; and, indeed, I have often noticed that the neighbour-

hood of great waters breeds in souls a mysticism which is remote from the very understanding of land-dwellers.

How I saw her was thus:—

I was fishing, on a day of chill calm, in a dinghy off the flat coast. The stillness of the morning had tempted me some distance from the village where I was staying. Presently a sense of bad sport and healthy famine 'plumped' in me, so to speak, for luncheon, and I looked about for a spot picturesque enough to add a zest to sandwiches, whisky, and tobacco. Close by, a little creek or estuary ran up into a mere, between which and the sea lay a cluster of low sand-hills; and thither I pulled. The spot, when I reached it, was calm, chill desolation manifest—lifeless water and lifeless sand, with no traffic between them but the dead interchange of salt. Low sedges, at first, and behind them low woods were mirrored in the water at a distance, with an interval between me and them of sheeted glass; and right across this shining pool ran a dim, half-drowned causeway—the seapath, it appeared, to and from a lonely house which I could just distinguish squatting among trees. It was Tryphena's house.

Now, paddling dispiritedly, I turned a cold dune, and saw a mermaid before me. At least, that was my instant impression. The creature sat coiled on the strand, combing her hair—that was certain, for I saw the gold-green tresses of it whisked by her action into rainbow threads. It appeared as certain that her upper half was flesh and her lower fish; and it was only on my nearer approach that this latter resolved itself into a pale green skirt, roped, owing to her posture, about her limbs, and the hem fanned out at her feet into a tail fin. Thus also her bosom, which had appeared naked, became a bodice, as near to her flesh in colour and texture as a smock is to a lady's-smock, which some call a cuckoo-flower.

It was plain enough now; yet the illusion for the moment had quite startled me.

As I came near, she paused in her strange business to canvass me. It was Tryphena herself, as after-inquiry informed me. I have never seen so lovely a creature. Her eyes, as they regarded me passing, were something to haunt a dream: so great in tragedy—not fathomless, but all in motion near their surfaces, it seemed, with green and rooted sorrows. They were the eyes, I thought, of an Undine late-humanised, late awakened to the rapturous and troubled knowledge of the woman's burden. Her forehead was most fair, and the glistening thatch divided on it like a golden cloud revealing the face of a wondering angel.

I passed, and a sand-heap stole my vision foot by foot. The vision

was gone when I returned. I have reason to believe it was vouchsafed me within a few months of the coming of the ghost-child.

On the morning succeeding the night of the day on which Jason and Tryphena were to have been married, the girl came down from her bedroom with an extraordinary expression of still rapture on her face. After breakfast she took the old man into her confidence. She was childish still; her manner quite youthfully thrilling; but now there was a newborn wonder in it that hovered on the pink of shame.

‘Father! I have been under the deep waters and found him. He came to me last night in my dreams—so sobbing, so impassioned—to assure me that he had never really ceased to love me, though he had near broken his own heart pretending it. Poor boy! poor ghost! What could I do but take him to my arms? And all night he lay there, blest and forgiven, till in the morning he melted away with a sigh that woke me; and it seemed to me that I came up dripping from the sea.’

‘My boy! He has come back!’ chuckled the old man. ‘What have you done with him, Tryphena?’

‘I will hold him tighter the next time,’ she said.

But the spirit of Jason visited her dreams no more.

That was in March. In the Christmas following, when the mere was locked in stillness, and the wan reflection of snow mingled on the ceiling with the red dance of firelight, one morning the old man came hurrying and panting to Tryphena’s door.

‘Tryphena! Come down quickly! My boy, my Jason, has come back! It was a lie that they told us about his being lost at sea!’

Her heart leapt like a candle-flame! What new delusion of the old man’s was this? She hurried over her dressing and descended. A garrulous old voice mingled with a childish treble in the breakfast-room. Hardly breathing, she turned the handle of the door, and saw Jason before her.

But it was Jason, the prattling babe of her first knowledge; Jason, the flaxen-headed, apple-cheeked cherub of the nursery; Jason, the confiding, the merry, the loving, before pride had come to warp his innocence. She fell on her knees to the child, and with a burst of ecstasy caught him to her heart.

She asked no question of the old man as to when or whence this apparition had come, or why he was here. For some reason she dared not. She accepted him as some waif, whom an accidental likeness had made glorious to their hungering hearts. As for the father, he was utterly satisfied and content. He had heard a knock at the door, he said, and had opened it and found this. The child was naked, and his pink, wet body glazed with ice. Yet he seemed insensible to the killing

cold. It was Jason—that was enough. There is no date nor time for imbecility. Its phantoms spring from the clash of ancient memories. This was just as actually his child as—more so, in fact, than—the grown young figure which, for all its manhood, had dissolved into the mist of waters. He was more familiar with, more confident of it, after all. It had come back to be unquestioningly dependent on him; and that was likeliest the real Jason, flesh of his flesh.

‘Who are you, darling?’ said Tryphena.

‘I am Jason,’ answered the child.

She wept, and fondled him rapturously.

‘And who am I?’ she asked. ‘If you are Jason, you must know what to call me.’

‘I know,’ he said; ‘but I mustn’t, unless you ask me.’

‘I won’t,’ she answered, with a burst of weeping. ‘It is Christmas Day, dearest, when the miracle of a little child was wrought. I will ask you nothing but to stay and bless our desolate home.’

He nodded, laughing.

‘I will stay, until you ask me.’

They found some little old robes of the baby Jason, put away in lavender, and dressed him in them. All day he laughed and prattled; yet it was strange that, talk as he might, he never once referred to matters familiar to the childhood of the lost sailor.

In the early afternoon he asked to be taken out—seawards, that was his wish. Tryphena clothed him warmly, and, taking his little hand, led him away. They left the old man sleeping peacefully. He was never to wake again.

As they crossed the narrow causeway, snow, thick and silent, began to fall. Tryphena was not afraid, for herself or the child. A rapture upheld her; a sense of some compelling happiness, which she knew before long must take shape on her lips.

They reached the seaward dunes—mere ghosts of foothold in that smoke of flakes. The lap of vast waters seemed all around them, hollow and mysterious. The sound flooded Tryphena’s ears, drowning her senses. She cried out, and stopped.

‘Before they go,’ she screamed—‘before they go, tell me what you were to call me!’

The child sprang a little distance, and stood facing her. Already his lower limbs seemed dissolving in the mists.

‘I was to call you “mother”!’ he cried, with a smile and toss of his hand.

Even as he spoke, his pretty features wavered and vanished. The snow broke into him, or he became part with it. Where he had been, a

gleam of iridescent dust seemed to show one moment before it sank and was extinguished in the falling cloud. Then there was only the snow, heaping an eternal chaos with nothingness.

Tryphena made this confession, on a Christmas Eve night, to one who was a believer in dreams. The next morning she was seen to cross the causeway, and thereafter was never seen again. But she left the sweetest memory behind her, for human charity, and an elf-life gift of loveliness.

The Ghost Farm

by Susan Andrews Rice

When Steven was killed we did not know it until nearly thirty days afterward. He went overseas in April, and it was the last of June before we knew he went out with a party of engineers to repair the railroad track, and was blown to pieces by a German shell.

We could not tell Maidie the truth. She knew he was dead, but concerning the manner of his going she was ignorant. They were engaged. Her love for him amounted to adoration. She was an intense, emotional girl, bound to be unhappy because of her sensitive nature and strong feelings.

She was under my professional care for several weeks the latter part of the summer, suffering from a broken ankle.

"It is the silence, the awful blank wall between Steven and me, that drives me frantic," she burst out one day, when I was making her a visit. She had been reading a letter from Steven, and it lay in her lap. She had a little package of his letters always near her.

"I know," I returned, with a sigh. I, too, had lost my nearest and dearest.

"I wish I could consult a medium," she said, lowering her voice. "How wonderful it would be to receive a message from him! I could hardly bear it, I'm afraid."

"Don't do it, Maidie," I said. "Better leave such people alone."

"The ouija board, then? It seems rather like a silly game, but—" I shook my head.

" 'That way madness lies', " I quoted. "I wouldn't, Maidie. Steven lives in your heart, in your memories of him."

She smiled that pathetic little smile she had worn when she wished to appear cheerful.

"You are right," she answered, and changed the subject.

In spite of what she had said I discovered she was reading everything she could find about spirit communication, although I never heard of her making any attempt to reach Steven in that way.

I was very busy that fall with influenza cases, and Maidie went into Red Cross work, and when the epidemic was over I heard she had gone to California. She returned early the following summer looking haggard and ill. I prescribed for her, but could find nothing really wrong with her. She took long walks, and, her mother told me, she always went alone and resented any offer of companionship. She thought it queer, and said she feared Maidie was drifting into melancholia.

Maidie came into my office one afternoon, and I was struck with the change in her expression: she looked happy and young; the strained misery had vanished from her face. I was puzzled. Could she have fallen in love? I ran over in my mind a list of her young men acquaintances, but none of them could I see as Maidie's lover.

Her mother had informed me her walks were always in one direction. Thinking of that, I asked, "Why do you always walk along the river road, Maidie?"

She turned a vivid pink.

"You won't understand, I know, but I'm going to tell you," she replied, twisting her gloves in her hands. "In the first place, you must know Steven and I used to plan that when we were married we would own a little farm. Just a little summer place, you know. He used to say every man wanted to have a farm. Doctor, when I go up the river road, just past the school house, on the bank, where the road turns into the woods, I see a little farm. The fields are neat and cultivated. The house is painted white with green blinds and the door is open into the hall, as if people lived there. Hollyhocks are growing around the kitchen door. On a table milk-pans are turned up to dry in the sun. There are some dish-towels drying on a line. And at any moment I expect to see Steven come around the corner of the house. I feel he is there, out of my sight. I wait, and listen. He hasn't come yet, but he will, some day, and when he comes, I shall go with him."

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Her face was luminous with joy. What could I say? What ought I to say?

"Do you think I could see the farm if I were with you?" I asked, speaking slowly.

"I'm afraid you couldn't," she replied. "No one knows it is there but Steven and me."

"Then, my dear Maidie, it exists only in your imagination," I told her, gently.

She smiled, as one smiles at a child who doubts one's word, and she went away.

I studied her case carefully. A good psychanalyst might have helped her, but I was not skilful in that method of treatment. I see now that we did wrong in circumventing her. In accordance with my advice her friends attempted to divert her attention from her daily walk. She was taken on automobile excursions; visitors came at that hour of the day; she was invited to go to moving pictures; duties were crowded upon her, in the hope of altering the fixed idea in her mind of Steven's waiting at the ghost farm. She was very sweet about acceding to the demands and requests, though sometimes she would obstinately refuse to listen to them.

August brought hot weather. The extreme heat wore upon our nerves; everybody relaxed. Released from vigilant watchfulness, Maidie left the house, unnoticed.

A terrific thunder storm came up, and Maidie's mother was beside herself. She had been lying down taking a nap when Maidie slipped away. She telephoned to me when the shower was over, as Maidie was not missed until then.

I got out of my car and started up the river road, a sense of foreboding in the back of my mind. I had not proceeded far when a tire blew out. Impatiently I left the machine and hurried on foot past the weather-beaten old schoolhouse a short distance. Suddenly I stopped in my tracks. The sun had come out, and I saw the ghost farm. It was exactly as Maidie had described it: a stretch of green fields; a small white house with green blinds; hollyhocks growing by the kitchen door; milk-pans glistening in the sun, drying on a table; towels fluttering on a line. I was struck dumb, and stood motionless, hardly able to draw my breath at the strangeness of the scene.

In a few minutes the vision, or mirage, vanished. Then I perceived a tall oak tree split in half by a bolt of lightning. At the foot of the tree lay Maidie, on the wet ground, a smile of rapture on her upturned face.

I knelt beside her and examined heart and pulse. Nothing could be done, her spirit had left its earthly body. She had gone to be with Steven.

Ghost Story

by Alan Brennert

Dusk-devils come spinning up from behind the swollen horizon, all blood and scabs in the sunset glow, pinwheeling into the gray shadows at our feet. We catch them down there, tugging-scratching-kicking themselves into our path, trying to make us trip and fall. And they hide. In the ground, in the rocks, in the new dust and the old. Nuisances, nothing more than that; scratchy scrawny annoyances that chatter and chuckle at our feet. Dusk-devils.

Dusk deepens to night and the devils drop away, scurry back to meet the sinking sun. Then the real devils start in, then the Skyghosts flicker and dance on the cloudless black. They're tall, wider than the sun; the moon could be one of their balls turned white and free-swung. And they're covered. All *over*: dim reds, faded greens, colors worn to a whisper by the sky. Only their hands and faces are pasted naked against the night, even some of their eyes framed by glass and metal. The same six or seven of them, feet cut off at the horizon, staring down at us, moving their mouths but damn it if nothing ever comes out. I watch their lips sometimes, try to read the words, but they're speaking in a distant tongue; I turn away and to hell with it, they're only ghosts.

Skyghosts. Knew a man once looked a lot like them, close enough to be a brother; same type of face, you know, same kind of build; he was like a ghost himself, but didn't fade with the day; we had to kill him . . .

You get through the night all right—Skyghosts above you staring and speaking, you're cold and huddling in groupfucks to keep 'em away—and then there's a sort of almost-dawn, gray enough for the dusk-devils to come back and scuttle round at naked thighs and cold,

flat bottoms. Day comes quicker than night, though, and they run back to the edge of the world to wait out the sun. They've got time.

Time. Wondered how it worked, once; one moment you're here and the next you're *there*, what happened to *here*? is it gone or what?; tried to stand still between seconds but I couldn't, I just kept moving . . .

Everything's moving. Morning's the hunt for food, the scrambling that puts the devils to shame. Morning's the rush for shrubs and pissholes; if you don't do it private, there's a stink on the land nobody wants. Morning's the first moment of day and the start of the long slow slide down to night. Morning's moving.

Moving's something to do while you die.

It's the laughter, mind you; it's the giggling and cackling you hear from beneath the earth, that's what hurts. Beneath the earth, that's where they're buried, those dead ones who do the job the ghosts and devils do, but do it best.

Fine day, they'll say. Look at the sky!

A buried chuckle.

Look at that sky.

Goes on like that, laughter in the earth. Our parents' laughter, damn them. Laughing at us for being so stupid. So we move. We run over the parched desert through the ruins of a yestertown, we search for food and try not to hear the laughter. Some of us, we run fast enough, we die from the effort; we're not all that strong. That calls for a celebration, then, that calls for running and yelling and dayfucking, that calls for a lot.

Goes like this:

Someone falls, usually he's been chasing something across the plains, he keels over and lies flat on the ground. Where he's lying there's no laughter for a while, as if the dead ones don't know what to make of this yet. Then suddenly it starts up again, weaker: they've lost another victim, but they've got to keep laughing.

We'll gather round and stare at the body a few seconds, and then somebody'll start laughing right in with those bastards down *there* and it's started. The food of the morning is wolfed down, and then we try some games before the body's got too stiff to stand a good prick, and then we'll start some stories going, maybe about the dead man, maybe not.

Stories are my specialty. You know that, listening. I make a few up, hear secondhand of some, pass others along.

Once I told how I visited a cave in the bleeding valley, near the horizon where the Skyghosts stand; saw metal inside, dabbed red by

the sun; heard the clack of the dead ones' metal soles on the hard iron floor of the earth's belly. Apart from the machines, the cave is hollow; some say that's where the Skyghosts go during the day. Maybe so. Maybe that's why some call the ghosts by other names: like *hollow-grams*. Maybe so.

Stories help fill the days when most of the time there's nothing to do but shrug off the heat or the cold and sit on the torn ground while the dead ones poke and point at the sky. They always did that, even when they weren't dead: *The sky. Look at the sky. We used to touch it . . .*

I'll tell you something and I don't care who hears it, I'm sick of the sky and I hate it and I say fuck it, fuck the whole bluewhitehotcold sky!

Fine day . . .

One of my stories never caught on is the one about people who used to make things in their heads, waking dreams they tried to build and sometimes did. Most everyone laughs at that, says, "No one can build, it isn't done." Then I say that these people didn't always build *right*, sometimes they made nightmares for themselves because they couldn't dream anything else, and then they built those too—only they weren't real, just dreams that only they could see. Everyone turns away at this and won't speak to me for the longest while and I'm sorry I said it and please don't you turn away, no!

Something else. Something else:

Afternoons are playtimes, times you go exploring, walk three steps past where you walked yesterday, or hurl a rock over a hill and wait to hear a noise. It's getting harder to play every day, though; the rocks bite and the ground turns to mud as you walk. Getting harder to do anything more than sweat or shiver.

Knew a woman once got it into her head that the dead flew over the burnt hills to another world; damned if she didn't go trotting over there after her dead brother; she never came back, but at least she *went*. I loved her for that.

No one goes over the hill anymore.

The sun's got too old to light our way, I guess. Times it looks as dead as the rest of us. That's what the dead ones told us before they were dead: it's the color of blood because it's bleeding, and one day soon the last drop will be drawn and we'll all of us die . . .

The sky!

Then there's the story that boils up off the dried earth every night as the dusk-devils scamper and scream around us and the Skyghosts flicker into life above. The words come scattered from every voice,

from childhood tales and wandering travelers, words torn and brittle with time.

About what the Skyghosts are saying. Nothing that ever makes any sense: *You're men*, someone remembers their grandfather telling them as a child; *Your minds*, whispers a woman who'd once lain with an old man and watched him die in her, her eyes are glassy with the memory ever since; *Think, please think*, begs a beggar, the plea handed down from beggar-father to beggar-son. Other words, other pleas: Sun. Die. Leaveyou. Sorry. Star. Sky.

No one knows how long they've been up there; every generation's seen them and there's never any argument over particulars, never anyone who claims they're *not* there, not like with the dusk-devils. Everyone sees the same thing, clear as the night they're hung on.

Someone says: They're tombstones.

Someone asks: For who?

Leaveyou. Die. *Your minds!* Star—
—ship . . .

We get hot and tired of the words: tired of trying to remember, trying to think. They all want us to think and it's getting so god damned *hard*. Maybe we aren't as smart as our fathers, or their fathers before them. Maybe we aren't . . . *right*. But we *try*.

I start to tell a story then to break up the sadness, to bring everyone into better spirits and start the laughing and singing and fucking. I start talking and my voice is sky-cool and very quiet, and before I know it I'm telling them about the people who make things up in their minds and live their nightmares and can't ever break out, and as I brush away a dusk-devil I see they're all turning and frowning and staring at the sky—just like you, damn it, just like *you* . . .

The Ghosts at Haddon-le-Green

by Alfred I. Tooke

The Bishop was poking the library fire. His wife had gone out for a walk, when the Vicar dropped in, and expressed a desire to have a most serious talk. It seemed that a story was floating about, that the churchyard was haunted at night. The Vicar had heard it from Absalom Prout, who'd had a most terrible fright, and swore he had seen, by the light of the moon, some specters cavorting around; while old Mrs. Mortimer-Bryce in a swoon by the gate of the churchyard was found, and later declared she was sure she had seen some ghosts at their midnightly revels; though several people of Haddon-le-Green quite loudly averred they were devils.

The Bishop was shocked as the story he heard, absorbing it *cum grano salis*; then muttered: "Ghosts? Devils? The thing is absurd! Some crank giving vent to his malice, or else some preposterous prank it must be, or somebody's idea of humor. Let's go to the churchyard. Perhaps we shall see what caused this ridiculous rumor!" And so, through the darkness, the two of them strolled, discussing the Curate—a new one; a rather frail chap, who by someone was told he should have a mustache—so he grew one! Thus talking, their way to the churchyard they sought, and opened the gate and went in, and sat on a blanket the Bishop had brought, discussing original sin.

The Bishop, orating, his mission forgot, and glibly expounded his views. The Vicar picked out a less bumpier spot, and gently fell into a snooze, till the Bishop's long discourse ran suddenly dry. The Vicar awoke, and felt queer. The Bishop leaped up, with a muttered: "Oh, my!" The Vicar responded: "Dear, dear!" For up from behind a new tombstone there loomed a shape that made both of them cower; and just at that instant above them there boomed twelve strokes from the clock in the tower.

Right over the tombstone the visitant hopped, and in the dim light they observed a piece of a shroud that about it still flopped, and both were extremely unnerved. The Bishop was portly; the Bishop was stout, with a wobble in both of his knees. The Vicar was prone to

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Right over the tombstone the visitant hopped, and in the dim light they observed a piece of a shroud that about it still flopped, and both were extremely unnerved. The Bishop was portly; the Bishop was stout, with a wobble in both of his knees. The Vicar was prone to

attacks of the gout—yet each ran with remarkable ease. They didn't go round by the gate, but, instead, they climbed o'er the wall, which was quicker. The Vicar fell hard on his nose, and it bled. The Bishop, he fell on the Vicar, and murmured: "Forgive me! The night is so dark!", then was up and away with a bound. The Vicar replied with a scathing remark which by mud was most luckily drowned. Then after the Bishop he hurriedly fled, till the vicarage safely received them. The Vicar's wife gasped; then she put them to bed, and with hot-water bottles relieved them.

The Vicar soon sent her the Curate to wake. Returning, she said with alarm: "He isn't in yet! No, I made no mistake! I hope he has come to no harm!" But just at that moment the Curate came in. They heard his light step on the stair. The Bishop, he muttered: "Original sin!" The Vicar called out: "Are you there?" The Curate, he entered with guilt on his face at this unexpected detection. A butterfly net he revealed to their gaze, and in a large jar, a collection of moths he had caught. "Pardon me!" he explained, as he gazed at the bottle enraptured. "My hobby, you know! I was somewhat detained by a splendid new species I captured."

The Bishop, he stared at the Vicar aghast. The Vicar collapsed with a moan. "Where were you tonight?" asked the Bishop at last, with a hint of relief in his tone.

"Where the finest of trophies my efforts reward. In the churchyard!" the Curate explained. "I hope you don't think it improper, my lord?"

The Bishop's expression was pained, but he choked back the words that he wanted to use, and murmured: "I'd rather you'd not. Perhaps some more suitable place you could choose, or some—er—less frequented spot?"

The Curate declared he would take the advice, and said he'd be going, and bowed, while behind him there fluttered the butterfly net that looked like a piece of a shroud.

My story is finished. There's no more to write, except that "ghosts" no more are seen cavorting around in the churchyard at night, by the good folk of Haddon-le-Green.

Ghosts of the Air

by J. M. Hiatt & Moye W. Stephens

Man long ago peopled the dark with specters that stalked the earth or flitted along close to the ground. And, when he took to the seas, he saw phantom ships and "Flying Dutchmen" and heard the souls of long-drowned sailors crying from the deep. Now that he has mastered the air, is he to have ghosts of the air? Civilization has advanced too far, perhaps. Yet there is a rumor in Europe of skeleton aviators piloting their broken planes far up in the silent heights above the battlefields of France. And there is a wood in Maine, they say, where on stormy nights a cloudy airplane falls and splinters noiselessly among the somber trees.

Easley appeared, none of us ever knew whence, in response to an advertisement for a stunt man to perform in a flying circus at Garland's aviation field. I was employed at the field as a mechanic, but it chanced that I was in the office when the wing-walker arrived. He entered with a slow, heavy tread, like a man half in a dream, and, at the manager's question, started as if roused from some guilty reverie. In a few terse, almost sullen words he explained his mission.

The manager looked him up and down. The applicant's clothes were shabby and hung loosely, even on his huge, gorillalike frame. A thick, dirty stubble fringed his jowls, and his dark, greasy hair was tousled and uncut. His broad face, immobile and almost vacant in its expression, was not improved by a pair of broken teeth and by small eyes that glittered occasionally, but were, for the most part, dull.

"So you're a stunt man, eh?" said the manager, rolling his cigar in his mouth. "What can you do?"

"Why not find out?" answered Easley.

Something in the rasping voice suggestive of a sneer angered the employer. He glared and seemed about to order the fellow out, then threw away his cigar, and barked, "Well, we'll try you out right now. You'll have to sign this waiver, absolving us from liability, and I'll have a plane ready for you right away."

The muscles on the other's face did not move, but I would have

sworn that he snarled. Currents of antagonism seemed to flow from the man. Seizing the pen, he scratched a hideous scrawl, "K. Easley," on the dotted line, at the same time smearing the paper with several blots.

Within a quarter of an hour the plane was warmed up and ready. Bert Cottrell, the pilot who had been assigned to take up the prospective stunt man, was curtly introduced to him by the manager, but smilingly extended his hand. Bert was a big blond man of thirty, an old flyer, liked by all at the field. In his easy, domineering way he seemed to have arrived at intimate terms with everybody. Bert laughed uproariously at his own stories and those of others, though it might be said that he was somewhat partial to his own.

Easley shook hands stolidly and peeled off his coat, preparatory to going up. Someone offered him goggles and a leather jacket, the last of which he refused. It was often remarked that he seemed impervious to the elements.

The plane took off, and, in a few minutes, Easley had proved himself a stunt man of rare caliber. He worked his way to the end of the wing, walking along the forward wing-beam outside the wires, hung by his knees from the wing-skid, and stood on the end of the top wing, bracing himself with his knees against the cabane. Then, beginning the unusual and really dangerous part of his repertory, he cautiously traversed the top wing, leaning far over to brace himself against the wind, till he reached the center section. Thence lowering himself on to the fusilage, he got into a position straddling the turtleback in the rear of the pilot's cockpit, and worked himself back to the tail section. After hanging a few minutes from the tailskid, he returned to the cockpit.

When the plane landed, Easley leaped down with a "Well, how's that?" However unprepossessing the fellow's personality, his abilities and the company's need of them had to be recognized. He was placed on the pay-roll forthwith.

After the flying circus, in which the stunt man acquitted himself well, Garland's kept him to give exhibitions to the Sunday crowds and do some motion picture work for which they had contracts.

But the passing weeks did not improve his standing with the boys at the field. Despite his daredevil courage, which they had to admire, his contemptuous reticence—together with something brutish and, I may say, sinister in the atmosphere of the man—shut him out from their sympathies. Bert, in what he believed his genius for parody, transformed "Easley" into "Beastly." He thus referred to the performer—in the absence of that aerial Hercules.

Indeed, it was big, formerly easy-going Bert who took the greatest antipathy to Easley. He flew the ship in all the wing-walker's performances, and any mention of the stunt man unloosed his anathemas. Pleasant-tempered the pilot could scarcely be termed now, for he, too, had become moody, snappish, and sullen.

"By God, I can't stand him!" he burst out one day. "When he looks at me out of those little pig eyes, I come near to committing murder."

One evening not long after, Bert returned from the studios in a fury. He did not leave us long in ignorance of the cause. First came a crackle of oaths and ejaculations, followed by, "The damn fool! On the way back from Marburg's he climbed out and started doing his stuff over the city. It's all right for a guy to risk his neck when there's an audience and money in sight, but nobody but Beastly would think of it on a cross-country flight. He deserves to pile up in a heap. If he tries it again, and don't bust his pants—nobody'd cry if he did—I'll bust them for him myself with my shoe."

"Did you say anything to him about it?" asked Shorty Wiggin, one of the mechanics.

"Did I say anything to him about it! I said enough to him, just now when we landed, but all he did was grunt. I was so mad I could have spun the ship and pitched him off."

Realizing, perhaps, the ugliness of his last words, the pilot suddenly fell silent and walked away.

Time went by, and Bert and Easley made frequent trips to one of the studios, where they were working on a Garland contract. On two or three of the return trips the wing-walker, it seems, was taken with the mood to "do his stuff," well-nigh driving Bert into a frenzy. Their clashing natures seemed to have seized upon this point for a bone of contention. Though none of the pilot's threats, made in our hearing, were executed, the relations of the pair seemed nearing a dangerous place.

At length Bert asked the manager to change him to other work.

"No, Cottrell," was the answer. "I haven't a seasoned pilot I can spare for Easley just now. Besides, all the other boys feel just about the way you do toward him, and, since you've flown for him all along, I guess you can put up with it a little longer. After this carnival at Moylesburg next Sunday, I mean to let Easley go. I've already notified him that we won't need him after that."

"All right," said Bert, and walked away muttering.

Though at a tension, things went smoothly until the following Sun-

day. Shorty Wiggin and I were warming up the ship for Bert and Easley, preparatory to their taking off for Moylesburg, a town some fifty miles distant. The stunt man was on the program of some carnival, scheduled there that afternoon.

"Now listen," Bert addressed the wing-walker suddenly and sharply. "Don't pull any of this cross-country stuff on this trip. It gets on my nerves."

"Aw, go to hell," was the reply, and Easley turned his back.

Bert's pent-up wrath burst forth. Striding rapidly forward, he grasped the other's shoulder and spun him around.

"Keep your paws off me," snapped Easley, striking away the hand.

Then, before anyone could intervene, there was a shower of savage blows from both men, which ended in Bert's going down in a heap under the plane.

"I'll stunt when I please," said Easley.

Bert sat up wildly, wiping the blood from his lips. "So will I!" he shouted.

He was pulled to his feet in chill silence. His last words really amounted to a threat of murder.

A horrible laugh came from the wing-walker, the upcurled lip exposing the broken teeth.

Here Shorty and I broke in with hurried interjections, patting both men on the back and urging them to forget it. They bundled into the plane and took off. We felt uneasy about letting them go, but there was nothing we could do about it. No one else had seen the incident.

The plane came back late that afternoon, and, with a sickly feeling, we saw it land with but one passenger. Bert climbed out and walked shakily toward us. His face was gray, and the muscles of his cheeks were twitching.

"Where's Easley?" someone asked in a hollow voice.

"Easley started his walking over Pennington Woods on the way home and fell off. I couldn't land to look for him on account of the trees."

Pennington Woods covers a good many square miles, and, though the locality where the pilot said Easley fell was searched pretty thoroughly, the body was not found.

Some of us had ugly suspicions, but we did not air them. Even should Bert be guilty, where was proof?

Cottrell, himself, was a badly shaken man. Obtaining a leave of absence, he went back to his folks in Michigan. Six months later he returned, red-cheeked and smiling, quite his old self. The affair of the

wing-walker had largely blown over, and, though for my part I often thought of it, Easley's death was rarely mentioned.

One day Shorty Wiggin and I were overhauling an engine in the shop, when Bert walked in. "Say, Shorty," he said, "something's wrong with my motor. She rev's up all right on the ground, but in the air she doesn't seem to turn up at all. Now I've got to fly over to Moylesburg on an errand for the boss. I'd like to have you come along and listen to her. I'd take Pink Eye here"—wiggling a finger at me—"but he gave me the razz on my brand-new joke this morning. The boss says it will be all right."

"Deedle dee do," said Shorty, thumbing his nose by way of leave-taking, and departed.

It began to grow late in the afternoon, and Bert and Shorty had not returned. Somebody phoned to Moylesburg and learned that they had not been there. Accordingly, a plane was sent to fly over the route and look for signs of them.

Darkness halted the search until the next morning, when Bert's wrecked machine was discovered in Pennington Woods. In it was Shorty, not badly hurt, but suffering from exposure and shock. Bert was not to be found. His safety-belt was noted to be broken, but he should not have been hurled far.

In the hospital Shorty was able to throw light on the mystery. He informed us that Bert fell or leaped from the plane some distance from where it plunged to earth. "As soon as they let me out of here," declared the injured machinist, "I think I can lead you to the spot."

Mechanics are a hardy breed, and Shorty was back in a few days.

While the party was getting ready to start for the woods, Shorty led me aside. He had a hesitating, troubled look.

"Say," he said, "I haven't told all I know about this, for fear they might think I'm off my head. Maybe I dreamed this that night I was with the plane in the woods. Maybe I didn't. But I've got to get it off my chest."

"About Bert?" I asked.

"Yes. About Bert's fall. We were over Pennington Woods; I had been listening to the motor, and looked up to signal Bert to throttle her down. Just then he shouted something and pointed toward the end of the wing. I looked, but saw nothing wrong. Bert was in the rear cockpit, of course, and I screwed my head around again just in time to see him tear off his helmet and goggles, evidently for the purpose of rubbing his eyes. The fearful wind took him full in the face, of course, making his long, sleek hair fly in every direction. With one hand over

his eyes, he fumbled with his goggles, replaced them, and again screamed and pointed. Horror seemed to have seized the man—horror and frantic fear. After about as long as it might take a wing-walker to get from the end of a wing to the fuselage, I felt a cold, sluggish breath of air pass slowly by me toward the rear. That is, if such a breath of air is possible at seventy miles an hour. It isn't, of course. Maybe it was fear. Fear of Bert's going crazy and killing us both. He began to strike and struggle as if he were fighting madly. In some way his safety-belt became unfastened—"

"It broke," I put in.

"Well, then, it broke, and Bert jumped out of the plane. I saw him waving his legs and arms and turning slowly over and over. Then he dropped from sight.

"I had my own hands full, for here I was, in an unpiloted ship. She had controls in the front seat, thank God, and I've had some flying instruction. But before long the machine began banking over sharply; she went into a side-slip and then into a spin. I remembered enough to shove forward on the stick and straighten up on the rudder-bar, bringing her out of the spin. But by that time I had fallen so close to the ground that I crashed among the trees."

Despite Shorty's directing, we had searched fruitlessly for many hours. Trees and bushes formed a dense entanglement. Nettles and other weeds came knee-high and we stumbled through a thick carpet of plants, leaves, and fallen branches. The dank, thick odor of vegetation pervaded the gloomy shade.

Suddenly a sharp shout at a distance split the chilly silence. I and those with me hastened toward it. There was Shorty, already the center of an excited group.

"My God!" he cried to me; "look at that! Look—what did I tell you?"

I looked. There lay the twisted corpse of an aviator, featureless and bloody—Bert Cottrell. But what was that entangled with the body? Whose splintered bones were those impaled in the bloated flesh? That shock of dark hair still adhering to the stove in skull, those broken teeth now blackened by decay betrayed K. Easley! And the skeleton of Easley was *on top!*

Shorty and I faced each other with an unspoken question.

Before long a fellow who had been staring up into the tree above spoke. "Look, Easley's skeleton must have been hanging in that big tree up there. Cottrell struck it in his fall and fell with it to the ground.

Cottrell's body was, of course, the heavier, and naturally went undermost. See, the branches are all broken."

His guess, they judged, was right. There were the broken branches to support it. But I—well, I often wonder.

Gibbler's Ghost

by William F. Nolan

Plippity-plop.

A girl a night.

Rainbow chicks: blonde on Monday, brunette on Tuesday, redhead on Wednesday. Falling like soft, ripe plums into Des Cahill's bed. Des shook the tree, and down they came.

Plippity-plop.

Ole Des, the Makeout King. Cahill the Cool. Mr. Codpiece. Remember how it was? Every young stud in the country envied him—walked like Des in his Gucci buckle-clips, wore his hair with the same cruel curl over one eye, thumb-crushed his cigs after three quick puffs the same savage way Des did.

Sure. Who could forget?

But now he's gone. No more movies or TV specials or Broadway guest shots in the nude. Women (and a lot of men) paid scalpers up to a hundred bucks to get a front-row peek at Cahill's equipment, and they were never disappointed.

So what happened? How come, at the top of the ladder, he walks, does the big fade, and is seen no more? I can tell you. I figure his public deserves to have the real rap laid down on Des Cahill.

I was his best friend—if he ever had one. My name is Albert. I took care of his income tax problems and lent him my shoulder. For crying on. And believe me, Des had plenty to cry about.

It begins with a ghost.

Des liked to swing high. His pad was in Benedict Canyon. Rafters, crackling fire, mile-deep rugs, a bear's head on the wall. Cozy. I was working in the back of the house, late one night, on a capital gains tax

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dodge for Des—my first time over to his place—when I hear this agonized female shriek of fear from the master bedroom. As I rush toward the room, out the door comes this pneumatic blonde wearing Midnight Hush eye makeup and a really terrified expression. She snake-shakes into her clothes, looking great doing it, and does a quick exit. Then she misses three gears on her MG going down the hill.

Des is standing by the bed, wearing a rumpled pair of Tiger's Eye shorts and looking bereft. That's the only word for how he looked. Bereft.

"It was him again," he says softly.

"Who's him?"

"The frigging ghost. Who the hell else would I have in there?"

Right away, I take his word.

"Then you've seen this spook before?"

At my question, Des chuckles. He laughs. He throws back his head and howls. He falls down on the rug, breaking up. Then he stops and looks at me.

"Albert," he says. "I am going to tell you something I have never told anybody else in this living world. I'm twenty-five, loaded with bread, up to my ass in fame, with maybe ten thousand cuddly little numbers ready to make the sex scene any time I lift a pinky—and you know what?"

"What?"

"Albert, I am a virgin."

We have a drink. Two drinks. We're on our third (vodka martinis with hair on their chests) when Des lays it out for me.

"First time I tried to make it all the way with a chick, I was fifteen—and that's when I saw him. The ghost. In broad daylight, at the beach on a Saturday afternoon. An old geezer dressed in full armor, looming right above us with this horse over his head."

I stop Des there and he tells me that whenever the ghost appears, he is always holding up a horse—holding it in the air.

"Like he's about to throw it at you," says Des. "Anyhow, the chick fainted and I was very disturbed. It happened again the following Friday, with me and the mayor's daughter. And that's the way it's been ever since. I get a chick into the hay and we are at the absolute moment of truth, you know . . ."

"I know."

". . . and *that's* when the ghost comes on with the horse. Naturally, it scares the shit out of my date."

"Naturally."

"No matter where I am, it happens. On location down in Pennsyl-

vania last summer for the coal mine flick, I had every precious young available female in town panting at my motel door. So I took 'em on, one per night, and always got up to the grand moment, you know . . ."

"I know."

" . . . when out he pops with his goddamn overhead horse, and the scene is blown. Thirty-six days on location, thirty-six chicks, thirty-six blowups." He knuckles his eyes, rolls his head. "Albert, I cannot go on. I've got the hottest sex rep in show biz, and I haven't made it once." He sobs—a broken, terrible sound. "Not *once!*"

That's when I give him my shoulder.

To cry on.

Later, I give him advice. Hire a class ghost-breaker, who knows his spooks, and go after the bastard with the horse.

This he does. The ghost-breaker is a nervous, kinky little guy, but he guarantees his work. There will no longer be a ghost when he is through. This we can bank on.

He goes the full route. With powders that flash and explode. With chalked circles around the bed and invocations and curses and lots of arm-waving. With incense that really stinks and hand-clapping and plenty of yelling.

But each time, just as Des and the particular lady of his choice reach the ultimate moment, WHAP! the ghost is there. Naturally, all the stinking incense and exploding powders and yelling and hand-clapping don't exactly delight the young thing who happens to be sharing the sheets with Des, and she always demands to know just what the hell is going on with this creepy guy hopping nervously around their bed. But Des is able to calm her down, and she's usually okay until the ghost shows. At which point she bolts, like they all bolt—straight out of the room, shrieking.

This goes on for three weeks, with Des getting thinner and more bereft-looking by the week. Finally, I ask him if he'd mind if I joined the group—to kind of size up the ghost for myself and maybe come in with some fresh ideas. Sure, he says, and that night there's Des and the uneasy ghost-breaker and a redhead with an immense heaving bosom and me, all of us in the master bedroom.

Sex, under these conditions, is never good—but Des manages to thrash himself into a damned remarkable performance until, ZAMBO! there's the ghost, right on the ole button.

I give him the careful once-over. A seedy old gink, scowling inside a cheapsie suit of backlot armor, with a crazy-eyed palomino above his head. I concentrate on the face. Suddenly, I let out a whoop.

"I *know* the bum! That's Joey Gibbler. It's Gibbler, I tell you!"

The ghost looks startled and vanishes, but, by then, the girl is shrieking and the nervous ghost-breaker is exploding more powders and Des is in no real condition to listen to me.

After, when things are more settled, I spell it out.

"Gibbler was an extra back in the days of the silents," I tell Des. "I remember reading about how he and this palomino horse both broke their necks doing a battle sequence for *The Queen's Cute Question*, one of those slapstick historicals they used to grind out at Monarch."

Des shoots up an eyebrow. "Dad directed that one—I know he did. It was his last picture."

"Exactly! And he died of a stroke the following week. Which explains everything."

"Not to me, it doesn't."

"Joey was sore over getting his neck broke, and he blamed your pop for it. But he didn't have time to haunt him. The stroke beat him out. So Gibbler decides to haunt *you* instead. He waits until you're old enough to taste the sweet fruits of life and then he cunningly denies them to you. And he'll keep on until we placate him."

"But how? How do you placate a sore spook?"

"The key is Joey Gibbler, Jr. The kid must be about thirty by now. Not bad-looking, I've seen his name in the trades."

"An extra trying to make it as an actor?"

"Right. So set it up for him. Throw around some weight at the studio and get him into a picture. Junior clicks, and his old man stops haunting you out of sheer gratitude. You can do it."

"Albert," he says, "I can do it."

He does it. Joey winds up with a fat part in *The Big Bottom* and overnight, the way it can happen, Joey Gibbler, Jr. is a star.

And, overnight, Des makes it all the way through the moment of truth. No ghost. Ole Des Cahill is devirginized.

He hugs me, dances me around the room, thrusts signed checks at me, insists that I accept his mother's wedding ring. It is a tearful, joyous occasion.

The next night, I get a jingle at my place. Des on the horn. Sounding terribly bereft.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"A new one showed," he says.

"Another ghost?"

"Albert, it can't be—but it is. It's Joey Jr."

I buzz over to Benedict Canyon in my Porsche. Des meets me at the door, crazy-eyed like the palomino.

We get it all on the eleven o'clock news: "Actor dies in freak set accident. Rising star Joey Gibbler, Jr. suffers a broken neck when a delicatessen set falls on him during a Jewish film sequence." Wow.

Des sighs. "That accounts for the white butcher's apron he's wearing and what he holds above his head."

"Which is?"

"A display case full of, mostly, bagels and cream cheese."

I'm sorry to tell you, but this story had no happy ending. Des, who swears he'll never resign himself to celibacy, has quit the acting game and is on the move. Last I heard, he'd covered most of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and was in the Australian back country.

What he's looking for is a very brave chick, well-stacked, eighteen to twenty-five, who isn't afraid of seeing, each night, a scowling spook in a butcher's apron with a display case full of, mostly, bagels and cream cheese above his head.

And they just don't hardly *make* that kind anymore.

A Grammatical Ghost

by Elia W. Peattie

There was only one possible objection to the drawing-room, and that was the occasional presence of Miss Carew; and only one possible objection to Miss Carew. And that was, that she was dead.

She had been dead twenty years, as a matter of fact and record, and to the last of her life sacredly preserved the treasures and traditions of her family, a family bound up—as it is quite unnecessary to explain to any one in good society—with all that is most venerable and heroic in the history of the Republic. Miss Carew never relaxed the proverbial hospitality of her house, even when she remained its sole representative. She continued to preside at her table with dignity and state, and to set an example of excessive modesty and gentle decorum to a generation of restless young women.

It is not likely that having lived a life of such irreproachable gentility as this, Miss Carew would have the bad taste to die in any way not

pleasant to mention in fastidious society. She could be trusted to the last, not to outrage those friends who quoted her as an exemplar of propriety. She died very unobtrusively of an affection of the heart, one June morning, while trimming her rose trellis, and her lavender-colored print was not even rumpled when she fell, nor were more than the tips of her little bronze slippers visible.

"Isn't it dreadful," said the Philadelphians, "that the property should go to a very, very distant cousin in Iowa or somewhere else on the frontier, about whom nobody knows anything at all?"

The Carew treasures were packed in boxes and sent away into the Iowa wilderness; the Carew traditions were preserved by the Historical Society; the Carew property, standing in one of the most umbrageous and aristocratic suburbs of Philadelphia, was rented to all manner of folk—anybody who had money enough to pay the rental—and society entered its doors no more.

But at last, after twenty years, and when all save the oldest Philadelphians had forgotten Miss Lydia Carew, the very, very distant cousin appeared. He was quite in the prime of life, and so agreeable and unassuming that nothing could be urged against him save his patronymic, which, being Boggs, did not commend itself to the euphemists. With him were two maiden sisters, ladies of excellent taste and manners, who restored the Carew china to its ancient cabinets, and replaced the Carew pictures upon the walls, with additions not out of keeping with the elegance of these heirlooms. Society, with a magnanimity almost dramatic, overlooked the name of Boggs—and called.

All was well. At least, to an outsider all seemed to be well. But, in truth, there was a certain distress in the old mansion, and in the hearts of the well-behaved Misses Boggs. It came about most unexpectedly. The sisters had been sitting upstairs, looking out at the beautiful grounds of the old place, and marvelling at the violets, which lifted their heads from every possible cranny about the house, and talking over the cordiality which they had been receiving by those upon whom they had no claim, and they were filled with amiable satisfaction. Life looked attractive. They had often been grateful to Miss Lydia Carew for leaving their brother her fortune. Now they felt even more grateful to her. She had left them a Social Position—one, which even after twenty years of desuetude, was fit for use.

They descended the stairs together, with arms clasped about each other's waists, and as they did so presented a placid and pleasing sight. They entered their drawing room with the intention of brewing a cup of tea, and drinking it in calm sociability in the twilight. But as they entered the room they became aware of the presence of a lady, who

was already seated at their tea-table, regarding their old Wedgwood with the air of a connoisseur.

There were a number of peculiarities about this intruder. To begin with, she was hatless, quite as if she were a habitué of the house, and was costumed in a prim lilac-colored lawn of the style of two decades past. But a greater peculiarity was the resemblance this lady bore to a faded Daguerrotype. If looked at one way, she was perfectly discernible; if looked at another, she went out in a sort of blur. Notwithstanding this comparative invisibility, she exhaled a delicate perfume of sweet lavender, very pleasing to the nostrils of the Misses Boggs, who stood looking at her in gentle and unprotesting surprise.

"I beg your pardon," began Miss Prudence, the younger of the Misses Boggs, "but—"

But at this moment the Daguerrotype became a blur, and Miss Prudence found herself addressing space. The Misses Boggs were irritated. They had never encountered any mysteries in Iowa. They began an impatient search behind doors and portières, and even under sofas, though it was quite absurd to suppose that a lady recognizing the merits of the Carew Wedgwood would so far forget herself as to crawl under a sofa.

When they had given up all hope of discovering the intruder, they saw her standing at the far end of the drawing-room critically examining a water-color marine. The elder Miss Boggs started toward her with stern decision, but the little Daguerrotype turned with a shadowy smile, became a blur and an imperceptibility.

Miss Boggs looked at Miss Prudence Boggs.

"If there were ghosts," she said, "this would be one."

"If there were ghosts," said Miss Prudence Boggs, "this would be the ghost of Lydia Carew."

The twilight was settling into blackness, and Miss Boggs nervously lit the gas while Miss Prudence ran for other tea-cups, preferring, for reasons superfluous to mention, not to drink out of the Carew china that evening.

The next day, on taking up her embroidery frame, Miss Boggs found a number of old-fashioned cross-stitches added to her Kensington. Prudence, she knew, would never have degraded herself by taking a cross-stitch, and the parlor-maid was above taking such a liberty. Miss Boggs mentioned the incident that night at a dinner given by an ancient friend of the Carews.

"Oh, that's the work of Lydia Carew, without a doubt!" cried the hostess. "She visits every new family that moves to the house, but she never remains more than a week or two with any one."

"It must be that she disapproves of them," suggested Miss Boggs.

"I think that's it," said the hostess. "She doesn't like their china, or their fiction."

"I hope she'll disapprove of us," added Miss Prudence.

The hostess belonged to a very old Philadelphian family, and she shook her head.

"I should say it was a compliment for even the ghost of Miss Lydia Carew to approve of one," she said severely.

The next morning, when the sisters entered their drawing-room there were numerous evidences of an occupant during their absence. The sofa pillows had been rearranged so that the effect of their grouping was less bizarre than that favored by the Western women; a horrid little Buddhist idol with its eyes fixed on its abdomen, had been chastely hidden behind a Dresden shepherdess, as unfit for the scrutiny of polite eyes; and on the table where Miss Prudence did work in water colors, after the fashion of the impressionists, lay a prim and impossible composition representing a moss-rose and a number of heartsease, colored with that caution which modest spinster artists instinctively exercise.

"Oh, there's no doubt it's the work of Miss Lydia Carew," said Miss Prudence, contemptuously. "There's no mistaking the drawing of that rigid little rose. Don't you remember those wreaths and bouquets framed, among the pictures we got when the Carew pictures were sent to us? I gave some of them to an orphan asylum and burned up the rest."

"Hush!" cried Miss Boggs, involuntarily. "If she heard you, it would hurt her feelings terribly. Of course, I mean—" and she blushed. "It might hurt her feelings—but how perfectly ridiculous! It's impossible!"

Miss Prudence held up the sketch of the moss-rose.

"*That* may be impossible in an artistic sense, but it is a palpable thing."

"Bosh!" cried Miss Boggs.

"But," protested Miss Prudence, "how do you explain it?"

"I don't," said Miss Boggs, and left the room.

That evening the sisters made a point of being in the drawing-room before the dusk came on, and of lighting the gas at the first hint of twilight. They didn't believe in Miss Lydia Carew—but still they meant to be beforehand with her. They talked with unwonted vivacity and in a louder tone than was their custom. But as they drank their tea even their utmost verbosity could not make them oblivious to the fact that the perfume of sweet lavender was stealing insidiously through the

room. They tacitly refused to recognize this odor and all that it indicated, when suddenly, with a sharp crash, one of the old Carew teacups fell from the tea-table to the floor and was broken. The disaster was followed by what sounded like a sigh of pain and dismay.

"I didn't suppose Miss Lydia Carew would ever be as awkward as that," cried the younger Miss Boggs, petulantly.

"Prudence," said her sister with a stern accent, "please try not to be a fool. You brushed the cup off with the sleeve of your dress."

"Your theory wouldn't be so bad," said Miss Prudence, half laughing and half crying, "if there were any sleeves to my dress, but, as you see, there aren't," and then Miss Prudence had something as near hysterics as a healthy young woman from the West can have.

"I wouldn't think such a perfect lady as Lydia Carew," she ejaculated between her sobs, "would make herself so disagreeable! You may talk about good-breeding all you please, but I call such intrusion exceedingly bad taste. I have a horrible idea that she likes us and means to stay with us. She left those other people because she did not approve of their habits or their grammar. It would be just our luck to please her."

"Well, I like your egotism," said Miss Boggs.

However, the view Miss Prudence took of the case appeared to be the right one. Time went by and Miss Lydia Carew still remained. When the ladies entered their drawing-room they would see the little lady-like Daguerrotype revolving itself into a blur before one of the family portraits. Or they noticed that the yellow sofa cushion, toward which she appeared to feel a peculiar antipathy, had been dropped behind the sofa upon the floor; or that one of Jane Austen's novels, which none of the family ever read, had been removed from the book shelves and left open upon the table.

"I cannot become reconciled to it," complained Miss Boggs to Miss Prudence. "I wish we had remained in Iowa where we belong. Of course I don't believe in the thing! No sensible person would. But still I cannot become reconciled."

But their liberation was to come, and in a most unexpected manner.

A relative by marriage visited them from the West. He was a friendly man and had much to say, so he talked all through dinner, and afterward followed the ladies to the drawing-room to finish his gossip. The gas in the room was turned very low, and as they entered Miss Prudence caught sight of Miss Carew, in company attire, sitting in upright propriety in a stiff-backed chair at the extremity of the apartment.

Miss Prudence had a sudden idea.

"We will not turn up the gas," she said, with an emphasis intended

to convey private information to her sister. "It will be more agreeable to sit here and talk in this soft light."

Neither her brother nor the man from the West made any objection. Miss Boggs and Miss Prudence, clasping each other's hands, divided their attention between their corporeal and their incorporeal guests. Miss Boggs was confident that her sister had an idea, and was willing to await its development. As the guest from Iowa spoke, Miss Carew bent a politely attentive ear to what he said.

"Ever since Richards took sick that time," he said briskly, "it seemed like he shed all responsibility." (The Misses Boggs saw the Daguerrotype put up her shadowy head with a movement of doubt and apprehension.) "The fact of the matter was, Richards didn't seem to scarcely get on the way he might have been expected to." (At this conscienceless split to the infinitive and misplacing of the preposition, Miss Carew arose trembling perceptibly.) "I saw it wasn't no use for him to count on a quick recovery—"

The Misses Boggs lost the rest of the sentence, for at the utterance of the double negative Miss Lydia Carew had flashed out, not in a blur, but with mortal haste, as when life goes out at a pistol shot!

The man from the West wondered why Miss Prudence should have cried at so pathetic a part of his story:

"Thank Goodness!"

And their brother was amazed to see Miss Boggs kiss Miss Prudence with passion and energy.

It was the end. Miss Carew returned no more.

The Grey Room

by Stefan Grabinski

Translated by Mirosław Lipinski

My prior apartment also didn't please me. At first it seemed that what I had escaped from was definitely not present here and that I would be safe from that intangible element which had forced me to leave my previous residence. But a few days spent in this newly-rented room

convinced me that this place was even worse than the last, as certain disturbing features which had estranged me from the other one began to exhibit themselves here in a sharper, more emphatic form. After a week at my new locale, I came to the sad conclusion that I had fallen into a trap a hundred times more intricate than the previous one. The unpleasant mood that had driven me away from my former home was now repeating itself, and in a considerably intensified form.

Becoming aware of this dismal outlook for the future, I initially tried to find the cause in myself. Maybe the habitat had nothing to do with it? Maybe I myself had dragged this sad tone along with me, and not fully realizing its immanent character, I was blaming my surroundings in a dishonest attempt at masking my own weakness?

But this conjecture was contradicted by the complete state of happiness I found myself in at the time and by my exceptional good health. Before long I arrived at another hypothesis, which soon became a certainty when confirmed by daily experience.

Armed with this knowledge, I sought information about the tenant who had formerly occupied this room. Imagine my surprise when Chainem's name was mentioned. This was the same person after whom I had rented my previous room. Some strange coincidence had twice made me his successor. Nothing connected us besides this; I didn't know who he was or what he looked like.

I couldn't find out anything more about him other than his name was Benjamin Chainem and that he had lived here a couple of months. When I inquired of the janitor about the date of his departure and his new address, he muttered some vague answer, apparently not having the least willingness to plunge into any specific explanation. Judging by the expression on his face, I suspected he could tell me a lot about my predecessor, yet he preferred to be silent either on his own initiative or because of the dictate of the landlord; maybe there was a good reason for his silence, or maybe information about tenants was not readily given out.

Only much later did I understand this careful tactic; indeed, from the landlord's point of view there was just one concern: it wouldn't do to frighten away potential boarders. The affair clarified itself, however, after my own experiences shed light on the former tenant and his real fate, which had been intentionally concealed from me.

At any rate, the similarity in mood at both places and the identity of their previous tenant gave much food for thought.

Gradually I came to the belief that the spirit, as it were, of both apartments had become imbued with Chainem.

I have no doubt that something of the sort is possible. On the

contrary, I believe that an expression like “leaving behind a bit of yourself” should not be taken merely as a figure of speech. Our daily co-existence with a given place, a longer stay in certain surroundings, even if it is limited to the organic world without any human connection, or even if it is confined to the sphere of so-called “inanimate objects,” has to elicit after a certain time a reciprocal effect and mutual influence. Slowly an imperceptible symbiosis develops whose traces repeatedly consolidate themselves over a long period and after a break of direct contact. Some psychic energy remains after us and clings to the places and things it became accustomed to. These inventories, subtle remnants of the previous associations, linger for years—who knows, maybe even for entire centuries—imperceptible to the insensitive, but no less real, and sometimes they’re made manifest in a more distinctive form. This is why people have a strange fear of and concurrent respect for old castles, dilapidated houses, and revered relics of the past. Nothing disappears and nothing goes out in vain. Along empty walls and desolate halls stubbornly wander the echoes of bygone years . . .

In my case, however, one important detail had to be accounted for from the outset. As the janitor maintained, Chainem had lived in this building for a couple of months, before moving somewhere else. Consequently, the time in which he could exert an influence on my room and infuse it with his mood was considerably shorter than the time he had spent before me in the previous room. Nevertheless, his imprint was more strongly pronounced here than in the prior locale, where he had the opportunity to effect the environment for upwards of two years. Apparently the strength of his radiance had increased and achieved results considerably more prominent in a disproportionately shorter length of time.

The question then became: To what could one attribute this increase in the capacity to pass oneself on to the environment?

Judging by the mood which permeated my present room, the cause of this phenomenon didn’t lie in an intensification of the life force of its previous tenant. On the contrary. Based on various signs, I concluded that some inner dissolution, some breakdown of the spirit, was at work here—and a strong one at that—which had contaminated the surrounding atmosphere. Therefore, Chainem was most probably a sick man.

This was verified by the fundamental tone of the apartment. There was in it a silent, hopeless melancholia. It exuded from the grey wallpaper, the steel-hued velvet armchairs; it emanated from the silver-frames of pictures. One could feel it in the air in a thousand, elusive

atoms; it almost rubbed off against the slender, delicate spider-threads being spun inside. A sad, depressing room. . . .

Even the potted flowers by the windows, and also the larger flowers in a couple of vases on the shelves, seemed to have adopted to the prevalent style by leaning sorrowfully in torpid pensiveness. Even one's voice subsided in fright somewhere among nooks and crannies, like an intruder scared by his own boldness, though the room was large and sparsely furnished. The sound of my footsteps died away without an echo. I walked about like a shadow.

One instinctively wanted to sit in a corner, on a comfortable plush armchair, and, lighting a cigarette, while away hours in reveries, as one aimlessly pursued with one's eyes little clouds of smoke, following their spiralling turns, their framed rings, their trailing ribbons under the ceiling. . . . Something drew one to the palisander piano to play gentle melodies in tones hushed and sad like the sobs of autumn. . . .

Against this grey, sickly background the embroidery of a strange dream began to reveal itself after the first week of my stay. From then on, I dreamt every night.

The content of my dreams was more or less always the same. The dreams appeared to be of a fixed subject matter undergoing only slight modification or minor diversity: they were various drafts of the same story.

The setting of this monotonous action was my apartment. At some point during the night my grey room, with its dormant furnishings, its melancholic, studied boredom, showed up on my dream screen. By the window sat a man with a pale, oval face, his head propped up by his hand, and he was looking sadly to the street outside. At times, this scene lasted for many hours. Then he would stand up and pace the room with a slow, mechanical step, his gaze fixed obstinately on the parquet floor, as if engrossed with some singular thought. Once in a while he would put his hand to his forehead and rub it, and in the process raise his bright, large eyes infused with silent melancholy. When his walking tired him, he would sit down again, but this time usually by a desk against the left wall, and once more would spend some time in a motionless position, his face hidden in his palms. Periodically he would write something in small, nervous lettering. Finishing this, he would roughly throw aside his pen, straighten up his frail figure, and resume his pacing. Apparently he wanted to make the most of the space he had, for he walked about the room in a circular line which the furniture arrangement didn't obstruct. I noticed, however, that the line was broken unevenly in the area to the right of the door, where stood a wardrobe; here the curve, which he described, changed

from the convex to the concave: it seemed as if he wanted to avoid this corner.

At this point, my dream ended. After several hours of his monotonous tramping, interrupted by a long or short rest at the window, the desk, or in one of the armchairs—this sad person, and with him the picture of the room, vanished into a sleepy limbo, and I usually awoke at daybreak. This entire sequence repeated itself every night.

The persistence of these recurring images and their most symptomatic style soon led me to the firm conclusion that the actor playing out these pantomimes was no one else but Chainem. These dreams, full of melancholic monotony, were, so to speak, a formative realization of the spirit of the apartment that I felt so depressingly, day after day; they were a materialization of things too subtle for the conscious state.

I assumed that the same event was constantly occurring throughout the day, but wandering thoughts and a vain intellect, too clever for its own good, prevented any clear perception; indeed, stars also exist in the day, but dimmed by the turbulence of the sun's overpowering rays they can only be seen after the setting of the sun.

Initially, I became preoccupied in observing these dreams and searching out the proper connections between them and the mood of the room. But I gradually noticed that I was succumbing to the harmful influences of my surroundings, and that the visions seen in my dreams and the room I dwelled in during the day had a negative effect, poisoning me with hidden venom.

I decided to defend myself. One had to engage in a determined fight with my invisible predecessor, obliterate him, and oust his traces, which permeated everything here.

Above all, one had to remove and replace the pieces of furniture found in this room. For, as I correctly presumed, they were one of the points of attraction for the menacing residue of his psyche. After their elimination from the apartment, I hoped to dry up several fundamental sources of allurements, cut several important, and dangerous, ties of sympathy.

I carried out the affair systematically, almost experimentally, through small, barely perceptible changes. So, at first, I had the hefty plush armchair by the window removed, replacing it with a simple chair. Already this minor modification in furniture reflected itself in a clear change in my dream, which underwent something of a simplification; namely, one of its moments was missing: the picture of Chainem in a sitting position by the window. Throughout the entire night, this melancholic did not once occupy the new chair.

The next day I removed the desk, and in its place I put a small, neat card table, not omitting, besides this, to change the writing implements. That night Chainem did, in fact, sit down in this area on an old, not yet removed, chair, but he didn't lean on a writing desk anymore, he didn't touch the pen lying nearby, and generally appeared to avoid any contact with the new furniture.

When, the following day, I exchanged this chair for an elegant, recently acquired taboret, he didn't even come close to the table. This side of the room became for him, as it were, a terrain foreign and unfriendly, one he shunned.

Thus I threw out, step by step, furniture after furniture, bringing in completely new furnishings in glaring discrepancy with the old—furnishings of lively-colored upholstery and full of intentional brightness. After two weeks the only remaining previous items were the aforementioned wardrobe and a nearby hanging mirror. These two pieces I had no intention of changing for the obvious reason that such action seemed superfluous: nothing appeared to connect Chainem to this corner of the room, and he ostentatiously avoided it. Therefore, why invite unnecessary trouble?

But this time I was mistaken. The reason for Chainem's avoidance of this part of the room was not indifference but a horrible memory. Not realizing this, however, I didn't touch that area.

The instituted changes elicited a beneficial influence on my daily surroundings: the room cheered up, the oppressive mood of the interior weakened, giving way to a more sunny atmosphere. Concurrently, my dreams changed to a new phase. As the metamorphosis of my home progressed, the ground was being cut out from under Chainem. At first I blocked him from the window, then removed him from that part of the room where once stood the writing desk, and next limited him to a few armchairs. Finally, after clearing these away, just a narrow space remained for him among the new pieces of furniture. Evidently the altered atmosphere began to depress him, for I noticed in his previously well-defined figure a certain dissipation: with each succeeding night this person became more subtle and started to evaporate; I saw him as through a mist. Eventually, he stopped pacing among the chairs and moved like a shadow along the walls. Sometimes his entire figure broke up, and I only saw fragments of arms, legs, or an outline of his face. There was not the slightest doubt—Chainem, beaten down, was withdrawing. Delighted with already certain victory, I wrung my hands with joy and set about to deal him the final blow. I had the grey wallpaper torn down and the room re-papered in red.

The result wasn't disappointing: the shadow of my stubborn opponent ceased to loiter about the walls.

Yet I still felt his presence in the air; elusive, exceedingly diluted, but despite this, it was still there. I had to make the atmosphere completely loathsome to him.

Toward this end, I arranged a wild orgy in my place for two successive nights. I encouraged the disorderliness of my inebriated guests, I inflamed their youthful appetites and passions. We went crazy. After these two riotous, sleepless nights, which caused me great unpleasantness from my co-tenants, I finally threw myself down on my bed in my clothes, totally exhausted, and immediately fell asleep.

At first my weariness prevented anything from happening, and I slept without visions. But after several restful hours my room once again emerged from the mist of sleep. I looked at it calmly, smiling in triumph through the dream: there was no one in the room, absolutely no one.

Trying to strengthen this conviction in myself, I began to victoriously pass my eyes over every inch of the apartment, starting at the window. Thus I traversed three-quarters of the room, inspecting closely the armchairs, scrutinizing the ceiling and the walls—nowhere a sign of that culprit, nowhere even the slightest trace. Suddenly, casting my glance casually to the dark corner by the door, that one part of the room he had always so neatly avoided—I saw him. He stood in a full, distinct figure, typically a little bent, his back toward me.

Just then he extended his hand to the wardrobe and, turning the key, opened it. He paused, apparently fixing his eyes on the empty interior with its rows of plain wooden pegs. Slowly, with calm reflection, he drew out from his pocket a type of belt or leather strap, and tied it to one of the pegs; he turned a loop and made a circle at the dangling end. Before I could figure out what was happening, he was already hanging. His body squirmed in its death throes, turned to the side, and was reflected in the mirror on the adjoining wall. In its depths I clearly saw the face of the hanging man: his mouth was twisted into a sneering grin; his eyes were looking directly at me. . . .

Uttering a cry, I jumped out of bed and, shaking with feverish chills, leaped through the window onto the sidewalk. Not looking back, I ran through empty streets, until I came upon some inn. I was soon surrounded by the shady company of suburban hoodlums. Their gaiety revived me; they were necessary for me at that moment. They dragged me along to another, more squalid tavern; I went. Then I went to a third one, a fourth, and so on—I accompanied them everywhere until the very end, until bright morning. Then, staggering on

my legs, I finally tucked myself into some hotel and fell into a dead sleep.

The following day I rented a cheerful, sunny little room at the outskirts of the city. I never returned to my old apartment.

Guarded

by Mearle Prout

The sound of a shot suddenly broke the stillness of the May morning, and echoed back from across the valley. A puff of blue smoke arose from a clump of green-briars and drifted away downwind. Out in the road, Abner Simmons dropped the bag of grain he was carrying and, with a look of dumb surprise, sank in a quivering heap to the ground. Half his side had been shot away.

The green-briars parted with a sudden life and Jed Tolliver emerged, straightening his long form as he shambled toward the road. As he walked he broke his double-barreled shotgun, flicked out the empty cartridge and blew through the barrel, sending a thin stream of acrid smoke out of the chamber. He stooped over his fallen enemy.

"Said I'd get you," he reminded the other brutally. He inserted a fresh cartridge and closed the gun with a snap.

The man in the road rolled over with a convulsive movement and stared up at him.

"That kid brother of yours is next—and last," Jed continued. "Then I'll be through with the lot of you."

Abner grinned. It is an awful thing to see a dying man grin. Jed shuddered in spite of himself.

"You can't, Jed—not Ezekiel—"

It was not a pleading. Rather, it was calm, assured, as though the other were stating a known fact. Jed shuddered again, before he felt quick anger rising.

"I got you, didn't I?" he said, ejecting a thick stream of tobacco juice. "What makes you think I won't get Ezekiel the same way?"

"You won't, Jed—you can't—because—I won't let you!"

He was fast weakening from the frightful flow of blood. Overcome from the effort of speaking, Abner closed his eyes and lay still. A second later a sudden convulsive movement shook his body, and his eyes opened again. This time they were fixed and staring.

With a grunt of satisfaction Jed shouldered his gun and started back up the mountain, moving with the long effortless stride of the Tennessee mountaineer. He did not fear punishment for his crime. Here in the Tennessee mountains the long arm of the law seldom reached. The only thing to fear in a case of this kind was the dead man's relatives, and now there was only one—Ezekiel, a slim lad of twenty, who could not even shoot expertly.

Yes, Jed reflected as his long strides carried him through the sparse growth of cedar and blackjack, this part of Tennessee would soon again be a decent, God-fearing community. . . . Foreigners, the Simmonses had been, from somewhere back East—Carolina, or Virginia, maybe. They hadn't been like the mountain-folk. . . .

And what was that crazy talk Abner had made? He'd stop Jed from getting Ezekiel? How could he, if he was dead? Jed chuckled to himself. Here in Tennessee, folk didn't believe. . . .

More than a week passed before Jed again took his well-oiled shotgun from its place on the wall and started over the mountain. He was in no great hurry about Ezekiel—instead, he rather enjoyed waiting. Ezekiel was the last of the three Simmons brothers, and knowing that the foreigner was over there, and that he was going to kill him, gave life a curious sort of zest. . . . Likely the kid didn't even know who shot his brother. Jed laughed silently at the thought, adding to himself that the boy probably wouldn't do anything about it if he did know. He wasn't like the mountain people. . . .

But this morning all of Jed's impatience had returned. The sun shone hotly on the Tennessee hills, and raised an almost visible veil of vapor from the tiny branch which flowed through the hollow. Well, he'd waited long enough. With a grimace of distaste at the three-mile traipse across two mountains, Jed swung his gun over his shoulder and started down the slope.

When, an hour and a half later, he arrived at the small clearing which was the Simmons place, he was not as tired as he had expected to be. The nervous exhilaration of the man-hunt buoyed him up, made him tensely aware of things around him. He paused only a moment at the fringe of scrub oak that bordered the clearing; then, bending almost double, he sprinted a hundred feet to the grape-arbor.

Safe inside the leafy bower, Jed leaned his gun against a supporting

post and looked about. Here the vines had been trained over a rude wooden lattice so that a thick wall and roof of leaves now effectively hid him from anyone outside.

Jed parted the leaves carefully and peered out. A hundred feet behind him was the low wall of forest he had just left; two hundred feet in front of him was the house—a rude two-room shack; two hundred feet beyond that the wall of the forest began again. Jed looked at the house more closely. There was no sign of movement, but the thin line of smoke which curled from the chimney told him that Ezekiel was inside, probably preparing his midday meal. With a sigh of contentment he sat down and leaned back closer to his gun, idly listening to the chatter of birds in the forest, and the rustling of the leaves in the arbor.

How long Jed sat there he did not know. He was suddenly aroused from a semi-stupor by the sound of a banging door. Startled into instant activity, he swung around to peer through the leaves. Ezekiel was leaving the house, swinging in his hand an empty water-bucket. Going to the spring, Jed reckoned. If so, his path would take him within fifty feet of the arbor. Jed gloated.

With hands suddenly unsteady, the man in the arbor laid his gun on the ground, the muzzle barely extending through the leaves. Why take a chance? He would wait—at fifty feet he couldn't miss.

Unmindful of his danger, Ezekiel came slowly down the path, bearing diagonally nearer to the arbor. . . . Jed suddenly wondered why he no longer heard the aimless chatter of birds in the forest, why the light wind no longer stirred the broad leaves above him. It was uncanny, this noonday quiet. Impatiently, he shook off the feeling.

"So I can't do it, Abner?" he whispered to the empty air, but somehow the words clutched at his throat, and he wished he hadn't said it. No matter, a few seconds now—

Jed cursed the trembling of his hands as he aimed. What was the matter with him? He could see Ezekiel's slender form now above the barrel of his gun; he nerved himself to pull the trigger. The top of his head suddenly gone cold, Jed dropped the gun and looked quickly around him. No, the day was bright as ever—yet he could have sworn. . . . Half-heartedly now, he picked up the gun to sight at the form which had already passed the nearest point. He had not been wrong! A black nebulous cloud hovered over the barrel of his gun and created the illusion of darkest night!

Shrieking a curse, Jed Tolliver leapt upright and pointed, not aimed, the gun at where Ezekiel should be. He snapped both triggers simulta-

neously, but as he fired something clutched at his arm, and the hot lead sizzled harmlessly through the air.

Shaking as with a chill, blind rage within him struggling with black fear, the mountaineer stood irresolutely within his leafy ambush. He was quickly aroused to activity by a loud report and the crash of lead against the wooden lattice. A sharp pain burned his left arm where one of the pellets had found its mark. Ezekiel had fled to the house and opened fire.

Without waiting to reload his gun, Jed crashed through the side of the bower and fled to the safety of the trees. As he entered, buckshot spattered harmlessly around him.

Safe within the sheltering growth, Jed halted to reload his gun.

"Damn you, Abner!" he shouted to the stunted oaks. "I'll get him yet!"

As he turned to go he thought he heard a low mocking laugh, but reasoned later that it was only a squirrel chattering a protest at the sound of his voice.

Jed reached home in a blue funk. The long tramp across the mountains in the early summer heat had melted away most of his fears, but his nerves were still badly shaken. Now that he could look at the incident in a sober light, he refused to credit his senses. As the distance between himself and the scene increased, he had come more and more to believe the occurrence an hallucination, brought on by the long walk through the heat. After all, he recalled, he had almost fallen asleep in the arbor while waiting for Ezekiel to appear. Perhaps he had dreamed part of it? . . .

However logical Jed believed his explanation, he did not again go near the Simmons place. Weeks passed. Always he promised himself that he would soon finish the task so ingloriously begun, but day by day he waited, until nearly three months had gone. At first he had feared Ezekiel had recognized him in those few seconds it had taken to sprint from the grape-arbor to the cover of the woods. Later, as he heard nothing of it, he decided he was safe from that side. The end came in an unexpected manner. One afternoon early in August Jed had walked to the village. He stayed longer than he had intended, and shadows were already growing long when he started home. Not wishing to be out later than necessary, he took a short-cut through the woods which would take him within a half-mile of the Simmons place.

The sun was setting as he entered the Simmons hollow, a half-mile below the house. He felt vaguely uneasy. Though he told himself he was not frightened, he found himself wishing for the protection of his

gun. Nervously, his hand strayed to the hunting-knife stuck in his belt, and tested the keen edge.

Walking diagonally across the hollow, which was largely devoid of trees, he turned aside to go around a cluster of young cedars which was directly in his path. Suddenly he drew back sharply. Again his hand tested the keen edge of that knife, but not this time from nervousness. Jed was not thinking now of defense.

Two hundred feet beyond the cedars, on the smooth unbroken grass floor of the hollow, was a man milking. His back was turned to the cedars, but Jed thought he recognized that slim youthful form. He believed it was Ezekiel.

Stepping lightly, one hand on his belt where he could immediately grasp the knife, Jed moved into the open. Halfway across the level space, his hand moved yet closer to the knife, while the ghost of a grin curved his lips. Without a doubt it was Ezekiel Simmons. The man milking did not look up. The milk jetted into the half-filled bucket with a low murmur, just loud enough to mask Jed's guarded footsteps.

Step by step Jed advanced. If only Ezekiel did not see him! If only the cow did not sense his presence and turn unexpectedly! Step by step further—Jed was tense with excitement. There was no midday sun this time to blind his eyes and fill his soul with a nameless fear. Nor would he be unnerved by the twilight stillness; it was always still at sunset, here in these mountains. . . .

Ten feet now. The milk still swished into the pail uninterruptedly, the steady grinding of the cow's molars never ceased.

Suddenly Jed tugged at his belt and leapt forward.

"Got you!" he shouted aloud.

But the exultant cry died suddenly into a moan of horror. The arm bearing the knife poised high for the blow, Jed felt something like an electric shock course through its length. Instead of swinging forward to strike the man in front of him, the knife turned in his hand, his wrist and elbow bent at a crazy angle, and the razor-edge steel ripped through the cords of his neck.

Staggered more by his realization of the awful consequences than by present pain, Jed sank to the grass, while gouts of blood spurted from a torn jugular. His first mad terror past, he became aware that Ezekiel was standing over him, scorn darkening his features.

"So it *was* you, Tolliver. Abner warned me—about you."

"I'd have got you too—only Abner—"

"Abner was a good brother. He told me—weeks before he died—that if anything happened, he'd—guard me."

Jed felt himself weaker. His head was strangely without weight, and

objects around swam lazily in the pale twilight. He lay back on the grass.

"Should have got you, Ezekiel—shouldn't have—missed," he murmured sleepily as the shadows gathered.

He raised his head slightly to listen. Was that a light mocking laugh he heard in the grass beside him? He listened again, before the darkness came down. No—he could not be sure. . . .

Harmless Ghosts

by Jessica Amanda Salmonson

"Truth be told, my dear Penelope, I *do* believe in ghosts. Yet you will forgive me for saying I have my doubts about some of the stories chronicled in your various books and articles."

I must say I was stunned by Jerome's confession. I had known him for years and thought him an utter skeptic. He loved to cast aspersions on what I, whether eccentrically or not, consider my life's work. And I've never demanded that all my friends support me in endeavors they find peculiar. But here I was finding out that Jerome had never been a skeptic in the least. The many times he 'pshawed' my chronicles of supernatural events, he was really doubting my personal integrity!

"Jerome," I ventured, "do you realize what you have just said to me?"

"Yes, that I don't believe any of those silly stories you have written down for that antiquary's journal in England, much less those big books you've done about modern hauntings."

"Yet you do believe in ghosts."

"Yes I do. I have an acquaintance, a relative I might say, who lived in a haunted apartment building. I had something to do with resolving that particular mystery. The resolution was quite simply the identity of the ghost, who my relative could not possibly have known anything about. So I'm not a doubter as far as that goes, although I've never personally made the acquaintance of any such creature."

"Forgive me if I seem affronted," I said, sounding only half as

annoyed as I felt inside. "So ghosts are real—it's *my* ghosts which are fabrications. Why have you chosen this moment to inform me that you consider one of your closest friends an outright fraud?"

Jerome's animated and much-creased expression went suddenly pale. "I meant no insult at all!" he exclaimed. "I thought we were good enough friends that I could tell you an honest feeling."

"Indeed we are," I allowed. "And I have never minded your treating me as though you thought me prematurely dotty and a superstitious eccentric. But your honest thought, it turns out, is that your good friend Penelope Pettiweather spits mistruths left and right."

"That wasn't my thought at all! I don't doubt you believe everything that you say you believe."

"Then, dear friend, you are calling me mad."

"A bit angry, I gather, but not mad," he said, trying feebly to inject a moment of amusement into our conversation. I did not feel ameliorated. He ventured further. "You say that you are sensitive to the occult world, and I believe you are. But isn't it possible that, once in the vicinity of such creatures as my very own relative witnessed, you become somewhat excitable on account of your sensitivity, and enlarge upon the experience in a manner calculated to heighten the effect?"

"Calculated, you say?"

"Only subconsciously, Penelope. I don't mean you're trying to fool people—only yourself."

I could not for the life of me tell what he was getting at. He didn't think me either mad or a liar. But he did think I made things up without realizing it. This was patently absurd to me, and I felt no less insulted. "I must say," I began, "you express yourself badly. You say I'm not a liar but have told tales which cannot be true. You say I'm not mad but have experienced things that could not have happened."

"Yes, that's right. You've got it." He was more satisfied than I with my rephrasing of his opinion. He continued. "You see, while ghosts surely exist for some reason or another, there's no reason to suppose them in any manner malicious. Yet the books and articles you have written, many about personal experiences, all have a foreboding tone to them, if not an absolutely menacing character. But this cannot be right. Why, I'm certain that ghosts are nothing but lingering aspects of our own selves. Even someone with a bad character can only be an insubstantial, utterly helpless shade. And shadows, my dear Penelope, do not bite!"

"I see," said I, thinking I was beginning to understand his belief. "Despite the fact that you have never seen me in a temper, or suffering

the vapors, or getting excited in any untoward manner, yet you believe that I have an excessive and unjustifiable response to mere shadows.”

“That’s it. The shadows may indeed be *something*. But that something is harmless. Just as some people are instantly terrified and have an unreasoning sense of doom at the sight of an itty-bitty spider or some old tomcat, you, Penelope, have a phobia for ghosts, all the more tragic for your affinity or sensitivity to their existence.”

“And you feel you have empirical evidence as to the harmlessness of supernatural events?”

“My friend’s ghost, yes.”

“Friend is it, or relative?” I asked. “You’re a bit vague on that point, Jerome. I for one never draw sweeping conclusions without the specifics.”

Now it was Jerome’s turn to be embarrassed. He’d gone pale when he realized he’d insulted me. Now he became very red-faced because I’d tripped him up in, at least, a mild mistruth. “All right,” he said. “I hate to carry tales about my own dear mother, rest her soul, and it has been my habit to tell the story as having happened to ‘a friend’ or ‘a relative’. But yes, it was my own mother, though I entreat you not to think she was any kind of fool or madwoman to see a ghost.”

“Since only fools and madwomen generally see them?” I said with a rueful expression.

“No, no! Not that! Oh, dear, I do offend you today, don’t I? Well, let me tell it quickly, so you’ll know what I mean. My mother and her second husband—my father had been dead for years, and I anything but a young man—moved into an old apartment building near Everett. This must have been, oh, twenty years ago. Bill—he was my stepfather, but as I was a grown man at the time I tended to just think of him as a friend and my mother’s husband—was an antique wholesaler often traveling about making ‘finds’. So my mother was often alone. She had been a widow long enough before her second marriage, she didn’t mind the weeks Bill was gone. But the apartment bothered her for some reason and she frequently called to have me stay over. It was some while before she told me there was a ghost. Of course I laughed at that. I’d stayed with her numerous times and never seen a thing.

“She told me that the ghost sometimes turned on the bathtub tap in the middle of the night, opened doors, and now and then moved things about to suit herself. The ghost was an old woman. My mother claimed to have seen such things as the over-stuffed chair sink in, as though an invisible person had sat down. And on various occasions, the old woman would appear, especially in the kitchen. The odd thing was that the old woman would be floating about four inches above the

floor, generally in front of the stove; and she would be making a stirring motion as though there were a pot of bubbling stew. It quite unnerved my mother.

"My mother's sense of honesty was so extreme that I often thought it was a fault rather than a virtue. If someone's hair looked awful though it had just been done, and that someone asked, 'How do you like my hair?' she was apt to say, 'It looks dreadful and your hairdresser should be stuffed.' No tact, my mother; but honesty was her obsession. So I believed she had seen what she said she'd seen. But without corroboration, I had to admit to her that I feared she was suffering from delusions. She was getting on in years herself and probably thinking so much about becoming a senior citizen that she had begun to imagine an even older woman in the apartment with her.

"Mother insisted it was no such thing. She added that on two occasions she had actually spoken with the ghost. 'This is my home and I want you to get out,' she told the ghost. And the translucent old woman drifting above the floor replied, 'It was my home first and you should leave.' My mother felt mildly threatened by this and started having me stay with her quite a lot, when Bill was away.

"I asked around about a tenant who might have worn black slacks and black sequin blouse, of a sort popular in the late 1940s; who was stout and had short, tightly curled white hair and rather too much make-up in the wrong places. This was as my mother described the ghost. Nobody had heard of such a woman having lived there. But the fellow who owned the apartment was a senile goat in a nursing home. His children managed the apartment house. I went to see him and it was hard going but I made him understand what I wanted to know.

"He said a lady named Eppy Sarton had died in that room in 1953, wearing her 'night out' clothes, including a black sequin blouse. As she was old and half blind, it was true she put on rather too much make-up in odd places. But she was otherwise pretty healthy and her death had been a surprise to everyone. An unexpected stroke.

"After that, I looked up the Everett Sartons, and found a great-niece of Eppy Sarton who had some pictures of her great-aunt. I borrowed one faded photograph to show my mother. It was exactly the woman my mother had been seeing. So, I knew I had the corroboration I needed, the evidence! I had to admit my mother was by no measure demented and that such a thing as a revenant does exist!"

When Jerome had finished telling me his mother's ghost story, he looked perfectly satisfied that I would no longer be miffed.

"But this does not explain," I said evenly, "why you confess such a wholehearted doubt of my own experience!"

"Why, don't you see . . ." he was getting animated again, ". . . the old woman's ghost was absolutely harmless! In fact, once my mother was able to call it Mrs Sarton, it stopped troubling her at all. Oh! There was one more thing. I looked at some blueprints kept by the city of Everett and established that the apartment house had been completely renovated in the late 1950s. The floors had been higher originally, the ceilings vaulted. That was all changed. The ceilings were lowered. An extra floor was gotten out of it. That's why the ghost of Mrs Sarton appeared to walk above the present floor. Fit very neatly, I thought! But every bit of it, harmless as can be. Yet have you ever seen a harmless ghost, my good friend Penelope?"

"Certainly," I said, still quite annoyed.

"Well, perhaps you have; but aren't most of them malevolent? I've read your books and they're always scary stories. Not like a real ghost at all."

"My dear Jerome," I said, my voice strained. "As well to say that since George Washington was a fine leader for his country, then surely there was nothing wrong with Hitler. But to be frank with you, ghosts are trouble wherever they appear, to one degree or another. And if your mother was never harmed in any manner, she was rather luckier than you may realize."

"See! Just as I thought! You always find a malevolence to things! Absolutely no reason for that, Penny! Except for the drama, of course. My mother's ghost would make a pretty boring chapter for one of your books, unless it had bitten off some of her fingers or something like that."

He was referring to the Maynard Ghost I had written about. It bit off some poor child's fingers before it could be gotten rid of. The smug look on Jerome's face was an extraordinary annoyance to me! Did he think young Jenny Maynard bit off her own fingers and spirited them away without trace before her parents got her out of that room? I shook my head in dismay and said to Jerome:

"Did your mother die peacefully?"

"Isn't that a change of topic?" he said.

"Only if she died peacefully. I seem to recollect your mentioning she died of a broken neck, poor old gal."

"Well she was getting feeble by then. Shouldn't have been in a second floor apartment, I suppose. I'm rather glad I didn't find her at the foot of the stairs. It was Bill found her, poor fellow. He really loved my mother. But what is this you're suggesting? That my mother was *pushed* by a ghost? I won't stand for that, Penelope! Getting morbid

where my mother is concerned! You have absolutely no reason to presume such a thing!"

"You're right, and I would not venture to say it happened that way at all, Jerome. At least, not until I could correlate some dates and interview some neighbors."

"What an insidious seed to plant in my mind, Penny! It's not a coincidence that escaped my notice. I had found the exact date of Mrs Sarton's death. It was May 22, 1953. My mother slipped and fell down those stairs on a May 22, also. I do say, though, that this is exactly the kind of meaningless coincidence that you are capable of running wild with!"

"If you will read my books more carefully, you'll know that I only heed coincidences when they begin to pile up. For instance, what were the ages of Mrs Sarton and your mother the day of their deaths? Well, you don't know that one yourself. I venture you'll be checking the newspaper morgue tomorrow. Don't be too surprised by it. Your methods of detection in tracking down the ghost's identity were very impressive, Jerome, so you must have asked yourself some other questions later on: Had your mother been especially anxious during the days before the accident? Did she disagree with you that Mrs Sarton was a harmless spirit? Did you talk your mother into taking no precautions? Do you call me variously a fool, a liar, an imaginative hysteric, and so on, because it hides your own guilty feelings in having reassured your mother a ghost was only a harmless shadow?"

Jerome was awash with sweat. He stood quickly, fists clenched, though I wasn't afraid of him one bit. He stammered, "The dead can't hurt anyone! I tell you that!"

"Very well, Jerome. You may be right," I said, trying to calm him. I really hadn't meant to hit his sore spot so firmly. I wouldn't have said anything but that he'd piqued me with unintentional insults the whole afternoon. He sat down, removed a handkerchief from a pocket and mopped his brow. He said, "You won't write about this one, will you?"

"I should think not," I said. "I never investigated it. I don't write about hearsay—and it was your mother's adventure, not yours."

He sank into himself, looking unhappy. "I did tell her it would be silly to worry Bill or to trouble everyone by moving out. It *was* my fault, wasn't it, Penelope? I made an awful error. I always knew it! I practically killed her myself!"

"Don't excite yourself, Jerome," I said. "I wish I'd understood your mind a couple minutes sooner. I wouldn't have teased you as severely. Your mother was old, after all. If it hadn't been a quick death

with a broken neck, it might have been a slow and awful one with strokes and a failing mind. Sometimes the only thing we can do is think of a tragedy as a blessing in disguise. Do that for me, Jerome. And if tales of evil spirits upset you, do you and me both a favor. Don't read my books from now on."

The Haunted Burglar

by W. C. Morrow

Anthony Ross doubtless had the oddest and most complex temperament that ever assured the success of burglary as a business. This fact is mentioned in order that those who choose may employ it as an explanation of the extraordinary ideas that entered his head and gave a strangely tragic character to his career.

Though ignorant, the man had an uncommonly fine mind in certain aspects. Thus it happened that, while lacking moral perception, he cherished an artistic pride in the smooth, elegant, and finished conduct of his work. Hence a blunder on his part invariably filled him with grief and humiliation; and it was the steadily increasing recurrence of these errors that finally impelled him to make a deliberate analysis of his case.

Among the stupid acts with which he charged himself was the murder of the banker Uriah Mattson, a feeble old man whom a simple choking or a sufficient tap on the skull would have rendered helpless. Instead of that, he had choked his victim to death in the most brutal and unnecessary manner, and in doing so had used the fingers of his left hand in a singularly sprawled and awkward fashion. The whole act was utterly unlike him; it appalled and horrified him, —not for the sin of taking human life, but because it was unnecessary, dangerous, subversive of the principles of skilled burglary, and monstrously inartistic.

A similar mishap had occurred in the case of Miss Jellison, a wealthy spinster, merely because she was in the act of waking, which meant an ensuing scream. In this case, as in the other, he was unspeakably shocked to discover that the fatal choking had been done by the left

hand, with sprawled and awkward fingers, and with a savage ferocity entirely uncalled for by his peril.

In setting himself to analyze these incongruous and revolting things he dragged forth from his memory numerous other acts, unlike those two in detail, but similar to them in spirit. Thus, in a fit of passionate anger at the whimpering of an infant, he had flung it brutally against the wall. Another time he was nearly discovered through the needless torturing of a cat, whose cries set pursuers at his heels. These and other insane, inartistic, and ferocious acts he arrayed for serious analysis.

Finally the realization burst upon him that all his aberrations of conduct had proceeded from his left hand and arm. Search his recollection ever so diligently, he could not recall a single instance wherein his right hand had failed to proceed on perfectly fine, sure, and artistic lines. When he made this discovery he realized that he had brought himself face to face with a terrifying mystery; and its horrors were increased when he reflected that while his left hand had committed acts of stupid atrocity in the pursuit of his burglarious enterprises, on many occasions when he was not so engaged it had acted with a less harmful but none the less coarse, irrational, and inartistic purpose.

It was not difficult for such a man to arrive at strange conclusions. The explanation that promptly suggested itself, and that his coolest and shrewdest wisdom could not shake, was that his left arm was under the dominion of a perverse and malicious spirit, that it was an entity apart from his own spirit, and that it had fastened itself upon that part of his body to produce his ruin. It were useless, however inviting, to speculate upon the order of mind capable of arriving at such a conclusion; it is more to the point to narrate the terrible happenings to which it gave rise.

About a month after the burglar's mental struggle a strange-looking man applied for a situation at a saw-mill a hundred miles away. His appearance was exceedingly distressing. Either a grievous bodily illness or fearful mental anguish had made his face wan and haggard and filled his eyes with the light of a hard desperation that gave promise of dire results. There were no marks of a vagabond on his clothing or in his manner. He did not seem to be suffering for physical necessities. He held his head aloft and walked like a man, and an understanding glance would have seen that his look of determination meant something profounder and more far-reaching than the ordinary business concerns of life.

He gave the name of Hope. His manner was so engaging, yet withal so firm and abstracted, that he secured a position without difficulty; and so faithfully did he work, and so quick was his intelligence, that in

good time his request to be given the management of a saw was granted. It might have been noticed that his face thereupon wore a deeper and more haggard look, but that its rigors were softened by a light of happy expectancy. As he cultivated no friendships among the men, he had no confidants; he went his dark way alone to the end.

He seemed to take more than the pleasure of an efficient workman in observing the products of his skill. He would stealthily hug the big brown logs as they approached the saw, and his eyes would blaze when the great tool went singing and roaring at its work. The foreman, mistaking this eagerness for carelessness, quietly cautioned him to beware; but when the next log was mounted for the saw the stranger appeared to slip and fall. He clasped the moving log in his arms, and the next moment the insatiable teeth had severed his left arm near the shoulder, and the stranger sank with a groan into the soft sawdust that filled the pit.

There was the usual commotion attending such accidents, for the faces of the workmen turn white when they see one of their number thus maimed for life. But Hope received good surgical care, and in due time was able to be abroad. Then the men observed that a remarkable change had come over him. His moroseness had disappeared, and in its stead was a hearty cheer of manner that amazed them. Was the losing of a precious arm a thing to make a wretched man happy? Hope was given light work in the office, and might have remained to the end of his days a competent and prosperous man; but one day he left, and was never seen thereabout again.

Then Anthony Ross, the burglar, reappeared upon the scenes of his former exploits. The police were dismayed to note the arrival of a man whom all their skill had been unable to convict of terrible crimes which they were certain he had committed, and they questioned him about the loss of his arm; but he laughed them away with the fine old *sang-froid* with which they were familiar, and soon his handiwork appeared in reports of daring burglaries.

A watch of extraordinary care and minuteness was set upon him, but that availed nothing until a singular thing occurred to baffle the officers beyond measure: Ross had suddenly become wildly reckless and walked red-handed into the mouth of the law. By evidence that seemed indisputable a burglary and atrocious murder were traced to him. Stranger than all else, he made no effort to escape, though leaving a hanging trail behind him. When the officers overhauled him, they found him in a state of utter dejection, wholly different from the light-hearted bearing that had characterized him ever since he had returned without his left arm. Neither admitting nor denying his guilt, he bore

himself with the hopelessness of a man already condemned to the gallows.

Even when he was brought before a jury and placed on trial, he made no fight for his life. Although possessed of abundant means, he refused to employ an attorney, and treated with scant courtesy the one assigned him by the judge. He betrayed irritation at the slow dragging of the case as the prosecution piled up its evidence against him. His whole manner indicated that he wished the trial to end as soon as possible and hoped for a verdict of guilty.

This incomprehensible behavior placed the young and ambitious attorney on his mettle. He realized that some inexplicable mystery lay behind the matter, and this sharpened his zeal to find it. He plied his client with all manner of questions, and tried in all ways to secure his confidence: Ross remained sullen, morose, and wholly given over to despairing resignation. The young lawyer had made a wonderful discovery, which he at first felt confident would clear the prisoner, but any mention of it to Ross would only throw him into a violent passion and cause him to tremble as with a palsy. His conduct on such occasions was terrible beyond measure. He seemed utterly beside himself, and thus his attorney had become convinced of the man's insanity. The trouble in proving it was that he dared not mention his discovery to others, and that Ross exhibited no signs of mania unless that one subject was broached.

The prosecution made out a case that looked impregnable, and this fact seemed to fill the prisoner with peace. The young lawyer for the defence had summoned a number of witnesses, but in the end he used only one. His opening statement to the jury was merely that it was a physical impossibility for the prisoner to have committed the murder,—which was done by choking. Ross made a frantic attempt to stop him from putting forth that defence, and from the dock wildly denounced it as a lie.

The young lawyer nevertheless proceeded with what he deemed his duty to his unwilling client. He called a photographer and had him produce a large picture of the murdered man's face and neck. He proved that the portrait was that of the person whom Ross was charged with having killed. As he approached the climax of the scene, Ross became entirely ungovernable in his frantic efforts to stop the introduction of the evidence, and so it became necessary to bind and gag him and strap him to the chair.

When quiet was restored, the lawyer handed the photograph to the jury and quietly remarked:

"You may see for yourselves that the choking was done with the left hand, and you have observed that my client has no such member."

He was unmistakably right. The imprint of the thumb and fingers, forced into the flesh in a singularly ferocious, sprawling, and awkward manner, was shown in the photograph with absolute clearness. The prosecution, taken wholly by surprise, blustered and made attempts to assail the evidence, but without success. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty.

Meanwhile the prisoner had fainted, and his gag and bonds had been removed; but he recovered at the moment when the verdict was announced. He staggered to his feet, and his eyes rolled; then with a thick tongue he exclaimed:

"It was the left arm that did it! This one"—holding his right arm as high as he could reach—"never made a mistake. It was always the left one. A spirit of mischief and murder was in it. I cut it off in a saw-mill, but the spirit stayed where the arm used to be, and it choked this man to death. I didn't want you to acquit me. I wanted you to hang me. I can't go through life having this thing haunting me and spoiling my business and making a murderer of me. It tries to choke me while I sleep. There it is! Can't you see it?" And he looked with wide-staring eyes at his left side.

"Mr. Sheriff," gravely said the judge, "take this man before the Commissioners of Lunacy tomorrow."

The Walked by Day

by Julius Long

Friedenburg, Ohio, sleeps between the muddy waters of the Miami River and the rusty track of a little-used spur of the Big Four. It suddenly became important to us because of its strategic position. It bisected a road which we were to surface with tar. The materials were to come by way of the spur and to be unloaded at the tiny yard.

We began work on a Monday morning. I was watching the tar distributor while it pumped tar from the car, when I felt a tap upon my

back. I turned about, and when I beheld the individual who had tapped me, I actually jumped.

I have never, before or since, encountered such a singular figure. He was at least seven feet tall, and he seemed even taller than that because of the uncommon slenderness of his frame. He looked as if he had never been warmed by the rays of the sun, but confined all his life in a dank and dismal cellar. I concluded that he had been the prey of some insidious, etiolating disease. Certainly, I thought, nothing else could account for his ashen complexion. It seemed that not blood, but shadows passed through his veins.

"Do you want to see me?" I asked.

"Are you the road feller?"

"Yes."

"I want a job. My mother's sick. I have her to keep. Won't you please give me a job?"

We really didn't need another man, but I was interested in this pallid giant with his staring, gray eyes. I called to Juggy, my foreman.

"Do you think we can find a place for this fellow?" I asked.

Juggy stared incredulously. "He looks like he'd break in two."

"I'm stronger'n anyone," said the youth.

He looked about, and his eyes fell on the Mack, which had just been loaded with six tons of gravel. He walked over to it, reached down and seized the hub of a front wheel. To our utter amazement, the wheel was slowly lifted from the ground. When it was raised to a height of eight or nine inches, the youth looked inquiringly in our direction. We must have appeared sufficiently awed, for he dropped the wheel with an abruptness that evoked a yell from the driver, who thought his tire would blow out.

"We can certainly use this fellow," I said, and Juggy agreed.

"What's your name, Shadow?" he demanded.

"Karl Rand," said the boy, but "Shadow" stuck to him, as far as the crew was concerned.

We put him to work at once, and he slaved all morning, accomplishing tasks that we ordinarily assigned two or three men to do.

We were on the road at lunchtime, some miles from Friedensburg. I recalled that Shadow had not brought his lunch.

"You can take mine," I said. "I'll drive in to the village and eat."

"I never eat none," was Shadow's astonishing remark.

"You never eat!" The crew had heard his assertion, and there was an amused crowd about him at once. I fancied that he was pleased to have an audience.

"No, I never eat," he repeated. "You see"—he lowered his voice—"you see, I'm a ghost!"

We exchanged glances. So Shadow was psychopathic. We shrugged our shoulders.

"Whose ghost are you?" gibed Juggy. "Napoleon's?"

"Oh, no. I'm my own ghost. You see, I'm dead."

"Ah!" This was all Juggy could say. For once, the arch-kidder was nonplussed.

"That's why I'm so strong," added Shadow.

"How long have you been dead?" I asked.

"Six years. I was fifteen years old then."

"Tell us how it happened. Did you die a natural death, or were you killed trying to lift a fast freight off the track?" This question was asked by Juggy, who was slowly recovering.

"It was in the cave," answered Shadow solemnly. "I slipped and fell over a bank. I cracked my head on the floor. I've been a ghost ever since."

"Then why do you walk by day instead of by night?"

"I got to keep my mother."

Shadow looked so sincere, so pathetic when he made this answer, that we left off teasing him. I tried to make him eat my lunch, but he would have none of it. I expected to see him collapse that afternoon, but he worked steadily and showed no sign of tiring. We didn't know what to make of him. I confess that I was a little afraid in his presence. After all, a madman with almost superhuman strength is a dangerous character. But Shadow seemed perfectly harmless and docile.

When we had returned to our boarding-house that night, we plied our landlord with questions about Karl Rand. He drew himself up authoritatively, and lectured for some minutes upon Shadow's idiosyncrasies.

"The boy first started telling that story about six years ago," he said. "He never was right in his head, and nobody paid much attention to him at first. He said he'd fallen and busted his head in a cave, but everybody knows they ain't no caves hereabouts. I don't know what put that idea in his head. But Karl's stuck to it ever since, and I 'spect they's lots of folks round Friedensburg that's growed to believe him—more'n admits they do."

That evening, I patronized the village barber shop, and was careful to introduce Karl's name into the conversation. "All I can say is," said the barber solemnly, "that his hair ain't growed any in the last six

years, and they was nary a whisker on his chin. No, sir, nary a whisker on his chin.”

This did not strike me as so tremendously odd, for I had previously heard of cases of such arrested growth. However, I went to sleep that night thinking about Shadow.

The next morning, the strange youth appeared on time and rode with the crew to the job.

“Did you eat well?” Juggy asked him.

Shadow shook his head. “I never eat none.”

The crew half believed him.

Early in the morning, Steve Bradshaw, the nozzle man on the tar distributor, burned his hand badly. I hurried him in to see the village doctor. When he had dressed Steve’s hand, I took advantage of my opportunity and made inquiries about Shadow.

“Karl’s got me stumped,” said the country practitioner. “I confess I can’t understand it. Of course, he won’t let me get close enough to him to look at him, but it don’t take an examination to tell there’s something abnormal about him.”

“I wonder what could have given him the idea that he’s his own ghost,” I said.

“I’m not sure, but I think what put it in his head was the things people used to say to him when he was a kid. He always looked like a ghost, and everybody kidded him about it. I kind of think that’s what gave him the notion.”

“Has he changed at all in the last six years?”

“Not a bit. He was as tall six years ago as he is today. I think that his abnormal growth might have had something to do with the stunting of his mind. But I don’t know for sure.”

I had to take Steve’s place on the tar distributor during the next four days, and I watched Shadow pretty closely. He never ate any lunch, but he would sit with us while we devoured ours. Juggy could not resist the temptation to joke at his expense.

“There was a ghost back in my home town,” Juggy once told him. “Mary Jenkins was an awful pretty woman when she was living, and when she was a girl, every fellow in town wanted to marry her. Jim Jenkins finally led her down the aisle, and we was all jealous—especially Joe Garver. He was broke up awful. Mary hadn’t no more’n come back from the Falls when Joe was trying to make up to her. She wouldn’t have nothing to do with him. Joe was hurt bad.

“A year after she was married, Mary took sick and died. Jim Jenkins was awful put out about it. He didn’t act right from then on. He got to imagining things. He got suspicious of Joe.

“ ‘What you got to worry about?’ people would ask him. ‘Mary’s dead. There can’t no harm come to her now.’

“But Jim didn’t feel that way. Joe heard about it, and he got to teasing Jim.

“ ‘I was out with Mary’s ghost last night,’ he would say. And Jim got to believing him. One night, he lays low for Joe and shoots him with both barrels. ‘He was goin’ to meet my wife!’ Jim told the judge.”

“Did they give him the chair?” I asked.

“No, they gave him life in the state hospital.”

Shadow remained impervious to Juggy’s yarns, which were told for his special benefit. During this time, I noticed something decidedly strange about the boy, but I kept my own counsel. After all, a contractor can not keep the respect of his men if he appears too credulous.

One day Juggy voiced my suspicions for me. “You know,” he said, “I never saw that kid sweat. It’s uncanny. It’s ninety in the shade today, and Shadow ain’t got a drop of perspiration on his face. Look at his shirt. Dry as if he’d just put it on.”

Everyone in the crew noticed this. I think we all became uneasy in Shadow’s presence.

One morning he didn’t show up for work. We waited a few minutes and left without him. When the trucks came in with their second load of gravel, the drivers told us that Shadow’s mother had died during the night. This news cast a gloom over the crew. We all sympathized with the youth.

“I wish I hadn’t kidded him,” said Juggy.

We all put in an appearance that evening at Shadow’s little cottage, and I think he was tremendously gratified. “I won’t be working no more,” he told me. “There ain’t no need for me now.”

I couldn’t afford to lay off the crew for the funeral, but I did go myself. I even accompanied Shadow to the cemetery.

We watched while the grave was being filled. There were many others there, for one of the chief delights in a rural community is to see how the mourners “take on” at a funeral. Moreover, their interest in Karl Rand was deeper. He had said he was going back to his cave, that he would never again walk by day. The villagers, as well as myself, wanted to see what would happen.

When the grave was filled, Shadow turned to me, eyed me pathetically a moment, then walked from the grave. Silently, we watched him set out across the field. Two mischievous boys disobeyed the entreaties of their parents, and set out after him.

They returned to the village an hour later with a strange and incredible story. They had seen Karl disappear into the ground. The earth had literally swallowed him up. The youngsters were terribly frightened. It was thought that Karl had done something to scare them, and their imaginations had got the better of them.

But the next day they were asked to lead a group of the more curious to the spot where Karl had vanished. He had not returned, and they were worried.

In a ravine two miles from the village, the party discovered a small but penetrable entrance to a cave. Its existence had never been dreamed of by the farmer who owned the land. (He has since then opened it up for tourists, and it is known as Ghost Cave.)

Someone in the party had thoughtfully brought an electric search-light, and the party squeezed its way into the cave. Exploration revealed a labyrinth of caverns of exquisite beauty. But the explorers were oblivious to the esthetics of the cave; they thought only of Karl and his weird story.

After circuitous ramblings, they came to a sudden drop in the floor. At the base of this precipice they beheld a skeleton.

The coroner and the sheriff were duly summoned. The sheriff invited me to accompany him.

I regret that I can not describe the gruesome, awesome feeling that came over me as I made my way through those caverns. Within their chambers the human voice is given a peculiar, sepulchral sound. But perhaps it was the knowledge of Karl's bizarre story, his unaccountable disappearance that inspired me with such awe, such thoughts.

The skeleton gave me a shock, for it was a skeleton of a man *seven feet tall!* There was no mistake about this; the coroner was positive.

The skull had been fractured, apparently by a fall over the bank. It was I who discovered the hat near by. It was rotted with decay, but in the leather band were plainly discernible the crudely penned initials, "K. R."

I felt suddenly weak. The sheriff noticed my nervousness. "What's the matter, have you seen a ghost?"

I laughed nervously and affected nonchalance. With the best off-hand manner I could command, I told him of Karl Rand. He was not impressed.

"You don't—?" He did not wish to insult my intelligence by finishing his question.

At this moment, the coroner looked up and commented: "This skeleton has been here about six years, I'd say."

I was not courageous enough to acknowledge my suspicions, but the villagers were outspoken. The skeleton, they declared, was that of Karl Rand. The coroner and the sheriff were incredulous, but, politicians both, they displayed some sympathy with this view.

My friend, the sheriff, discussed the matter privately with me some days later. His theory was that Karl had discovered the cave, wandered inside and come upon the corpse of some unfortunate who had preceded him. He had been so excited by his discovery that his hat had fallen down beside the body. Later, aided by the remarks of the villagers about his ghostliness, he had fashioned his own legend.

This, of course, may be true. But the people of Friedensburg are not convinced by this explanation, and neither am I. For the identity of the skeleton has never been determined, and Karl Rand has never since been seen to walk by day.

Her New Parents

by Steve Rasnic Tem

At first, Barbara had been thrilled. The Winfields were everything parents should be. Mr. Winfield was an accountant, interested in antiques and bird-watching, and loved to spend hours telling Barbara about the days of his youth. His exuberant stories might be considered tedious by some, but he told them in such a comical way, interspersed with winks and nods and little affectionate pinches on his new daughter's arm, Barbara could not get enough of them. She could have sat listening at his feet for hours.

Mrs. Winfield gave a lot of parties and spent most of her days doing charity work. But she wasn't like other rich women Barbara had heard about—dabbling a little here and there before going shopping or out to lunch. Mrs. Winfield worked hard in her volunteer work, and came home exhausted most every day. But she still always seemed to have plenty of time for Barbara, no matter how tired she was.

"A movie, Barbara?" Mrs. Winfield sat up in her chair, suddenly alive with energy. Barbara stared at her, a bit startled. Only moments

before Mrs. Winfield had been slumped down in the cushions, her shoes off, one gray hair dangling in the middle of her forehead.

“Well, yes. I’d really like that, Mother. You’re sure you’re not too tired?”

“Why, of course not! I’m never too tired to spend a little time with my favorite daughter!” Mrs. Winfield stood up, walked over, and gave Barbara a kiss on the cheek. “Now let’s talk your daddy into going with us!”

They’d both strode into her new father’s den, who looked up startled from the book he was reading. For a moment Barbara was afraid; after all, they’d just barged into his private study, interrupted his reading like two silly school girls.

But he grinned broadly and put his book away when her new mother told him of the plan. “Wonderful idea!” Before Barbara knew what was happening he’d ushered them both into the family car, and they were on their way.

It was a wonderful movie, and Barbara was aware of her new father and mother looking at her occasionally, just making sure she was having a good time. And that made it all the better. After the movie her new father took them all out to a nice restaurant and let them order whatever they wanted. They told jokes and stories—all of them, even Barbara—until quite late in the evening. They were the last to leave the restaurant and Mr. Winfield gave the waiter a big tip. Barbara could not remember ever having so much fun.

She first felt something odd about her new parents when her new father touched her on the left wrist. They’d been driving up into the Rockies, higher up than she’d ever been before, her new father driving and her new mother sitting in the back seat. Barbara herself was sitting in the front passenger seat, staring out the window peacefully.

Just before he had touched her, something had seemed odd about their arrangement in the car, and the way each member of the family gestured, spoke; and carried his or her body. Barbara had had the strange sensation of lost time, of a short-term amnesia. Suddenly she could not remember where she was, where they were going in this shiny new car, or even who these people were. Watching her new father driving, the way he held his burly hands on the steering wheel, and seeing the way her new mother held herself almost to the edge of the back seat, almost pensive in her expression, Barbara had a sense of overlapping time, and suddenly it was her old father Bob at the steering wheel, rolling down his window and screaming at a passing motor-

ist, her old mother Eve sitting on the back seat, ready to throw up as they neared the beachfront drive.

He hadn't meant to hurt her; he'd just been trying to draw her attention to the deer up on the bank, and she hadn't been listening so he had to nudge her. But it felt as if she'd been shocked. She jerked her arm back and screamed. Rubbing her wrist nervously, Barbara thought at first it might have been broken.

"What's wrong, honey?" her new mother asked with obvious concern.

"I . . . I don't know. It's funny . . . I'm just weird I guess, but it felt as if . . . daddy had broken it . . ."

"Oh, Barbara," her new father said with even more obvious concern. "You know I wouldn't hurt you on purpose."

For some reason their voices didn't sound right to her. It was like a dream, almost. Like her new name: Barbara Winfield. It didn't seem to fit yet.

"I know . . . sure. It was funny, guess you just surprised me, sort of. I guess I'm pretty weird, huh?"

"Why, Barb! Don't say such things," her new mother said. "You're a smart, beautiful girl, and we're just thrilled to be your new parents."

"Certainly are," her new father said.

Barbara smiled. But it didn't seem right; nothing seemed right. Something was . . . strange.

She touched her arm. She imagined she could feel the break in the bone.

Barbara rubbed the back of her dresser chair nervously, periodically going to the mirror to check her hair, her dress. Would they think she dressed too liberally, or not stylishly enough? It was her first dinner party at the Winfields, and she wanted to make a good impression on all their friends.

She rubbed the sore spot on her wrist. It had really been broken; they'd had it X-rayed after she'd gone sleepless for a week. The doctor couldn't understand it.

And he'd found evidence of the old break. She knew the Winfields were pretty sure her birthfather Bob had done that, and they were right of course, but for some reason she couldn't bring herself to talk about it. She had insisted on pretending she knew nothing about it, even though it was obvious the Winfields didn't believe her. What must they think? Probably that she was some sort of crazy liar. She felt as if she might throw up any second.

But when she had first been up for adoption she'd had this continu-

ing fantasy that if she mentioned her parents' names, wrote the words "Bob and Eve Baker," or even thought them, then her old parents would suddenly appear and kidnap her. She knew they'd never forgive her for letting the social workers take her away from them. They'd make her sorry she'd ever been born.

"Ungrateful little pig," Bob and Eve said from the mirror, Bob's fat ham of a left arm around Eve's scrawny shoulders, Eve's worried little mouse eyes suddenly gone fierce, Bob's alcoholic facial muscles slack and reddened. "All the money and aggravation we wasted on you . . ." Bob and Eve blurred out as Barbara began to cry.

Biff, the small black dog the Winfields had given her when she had moved in with them, began to growl at her old parents in the mirror, approaching the shiny surface, seemingly attempting to push his black nose through it. Barbara picked him up and petted him.

Her new mother had prepared the dining room wonderfully. The Winfields weren't really rich, Barbara had finally decided, but they did seem to always know the right way to do things. Her new mother had spent hours in preparation; the party came off like something from a magazine.

And Barbara had done well; she knew she had—said all the right things, made no mistakes at the dinner table, and seemed to know just when to smile or laugh to please people, even though she really didn't know what they were talking about most of the time. And everyone seemed to like her; that was the best part.

Even though it felt odd, as if she were some character the people at the party were watching, like they were watching a TV show, and she was a likable character in the program, so of course they just had to like her. But what if they turned the program off, would they see her as just an ordinary person then, and not like her? She chided herself for worrying so much.

Barbara walked over to her new mother as she was taking one of the dessert trays out of the refrigerator. She was going to thank her, tell her what a good time she'd had. She was going to tell her how much she liked living there.

But when her new mother turned and smiled it was with mouse eyes; it was with Eve's nervous, trembling lips.

"But Barbara, what's wrong, honey?" her new mother called through the door. Barbara hadn't been out of her room except for a few silent and uncomfortable meals for three days, ever since the dinner party. And because of what had happened after the dinner party. Biff had come into the kitchen where Barbara was closely, nervously

scrutinizing her new mother, and the dog had started growling, as if he didn't recognize Mrs. Winfield. And the expression that had crossed Mrs. Winfield's face, ever so briefly, Barbara was sure it was hatred she had seen there.

"Barbara?" It was her new father now. "You've got to come out sometime; we need to talk about this thing. We're your parents now . . ."

Barbara waited anxiously for his voice to change. As it had every time he'd talked to her since the dinner party.

"You little bitch!" Bob shouted through the door. "Come out or I'll break the door down!" She could hear Eve shuffling nervously beside him. "Come out or I'll tan your hide good!"

What had she done? Why wouldn't they leave her alone?

"Barbara . . . Barbara, it's your mother," her new mother called again. But Barbara couldn't answer. She kept waiting for the voice to change.

Over the next few days Barbara tested her new parents, asking them little questions about favorite foods, frequent activities, and events from her life with Bob and Eve. But nothing seemed conclusive; she didn't really know her new parents well enough. Her new father had developed a craving for hot dogs, which was Bob's favorite food, but perhaps he had liked hot dogs all along. Her new mother suddenly seemed allergic to a particular brand of household cleanser, the same brand Eve had been sensitive to, but couldn't it just be coincidence? After all, her new parents were still nice to her, were interested in how she was feeling.

But Barbara still wondered if perhaps it were all a coverup. Maybe the social workers had had something to do with it too. And no one had seen Bob and Eve for two years; they hadn't even shown up for the hearings that took her away from them.

She was ashamed of all her worries, but something was terribly, terribly wrong with her new parents. She was convinced of it.

Her new father decided to begin a garden, something he had never done before, she was sure. He didn't know the first thing about it. Her father Bob had had a garden, his pride and joy. Barbara started watching her new father in his garden, anxiously seeking any clues. She sat out on a bench by the rows of new plants each day, Biff curled up in her lap. Mr. Winfield didn't seem to mind, in fact he generally looked at her every few minutes with a reassuring smile.

"Get that dog out of here!" he said one day.

"What . . . Daddy?" She shifted slightly away from him on the bench.

"I said get that dog out of here! He'll get into the garden!"

It was her first real argument with one of them. She didn't know what to do. "He won't bother anything; I'll hold on to him."

The man advancing toward her with the trowel in his hand was not her new father.

She decided to pretend that her new parents were not changing.

She found herself paying closer attention to the words they used. "Mystery," "Power," "Ice Cream," "Appropriate," "Pay off." Could her new parents have used any of those words? Could her old parents have?

"Sorry," "Terrible," "Nasty," "Disobedient." After awhile none of the words seemed right.

"Murder." Barbara wrote all the words down furiously into a large notebook. She began to cry when she could not record them quickly enough. Her parents simply talked too fast.

For a time Barbara thought that her new parents might have been changed into a third set of parents, not Bob and Eve, but a couple whose names she didn't even know, strangers who'd really wanted a little boy but had, at last, settled for her.

"What do you like to do on weekends? What is your favorite actor or actress? Where were you my last birthday?" She asked the Winfields many questions, but couldn't tell if they were giving her the right answers or not.

She has lost her way.

No matter where she turns, Bob and Eve are waiting for her. They've taken over the Winfields. They've killed her dog.

The clothes she wears are Eve's clothes. The words she says are Bob's. She's lost her way. She cannot find her way out of this house.

Bob and Eve. They'll always be there for her. Reminding her.

She's in the car with Bob and Eve driving up into the mountains. Years ago. Her stomach hurts with tension; she's doubled over in pain.

"Stop yer whinin'!" Bob reaches over and slaps her across the face.

"Straighten up!" Eve screams from the backseat, her fingers in Barbara's shoulders like claws.

"Don't know why we put up with your smartness and your complainin'!" Bob screams at her.

And suddenly it is too much. Barbara screams and leaps at the steer-

ing wheel. Bob shouts and pounds on her head, trying to make her let go. But she is determined; she will kill her parents. She will kill them all.

Suddenly the car is floating away from the cliff, and the last thing Barbara hears is Bob weeping, Eve screaming and begging as they begin to drop.

Only she survives. But Bob and Eve will always be there for her. Reminders. When she walks down the street the faces of all the passersby melt, become Bob's face, Eve's face.

"No one can be anyone else for me," she says into the mirror, and Bob and Eve and the Winfields all nod in agreement—the first time, she realizes, her parents have ever agreed with her.

Highwaymen

by W. Benson Dooling

Boyle slipped a long pistol from his boot, and drew the trigger back. Its sharp clack-click was mellowed by the soft swish of his cloak, as he drew it more closely about his shoulders and waist; for this was a chill night, one of the somber kind, and this a minute during such a night when sounds soften expectantly, when insects cease their drone, and seem to wait. Boyle pulled lower the sagging front of his featherless velvet hat, and slipped a mask of some dark stuff about his eyes. His horse neighed.

From below on the road by which he stood, straight and expectant on his mount—a road that twined and curled down the mountainside, a hard-packed road much used by the private carriages of the aristocracy, and hardly wide enough for a public coach—came the rattle of hoofs of a jogging pair, and the clank and turmoil of spinning wheels. The volume of sound increased, grew louder and more distinct as the vehicle approached, and Boyle heeled his beast to the road as a small coach wheeled into view.

"Stand and deliver, whelp!"

Boyle's voice was acid, with a sharpness that brooked no argument. A frightened coachman hauled in his pair.

A moon shone, but softly; it was not bright enough to illumine any sentiment on the driver's face, but it disclosed a gaunt, gray-mustached man, who alighted quickly from the coach—an elderly, dignified, green-coated man, who muttered, "Sire, I had heard your kind were more polite!"

"Politeness is the courtly gesture of honest hypocrites, Milord . . . but quick!—your valuables!" Boyle waved his weapon carelessly, and leant low in his saddle, peering quickly into the dark coach.

"My money? There; it's all I have with me, fortunately!" The gaunt man sneered, and passed a small leathern bag to Boyle's waiting hand.

Said Boyle, "No jewels?"

Came the answer, "When traveling? But no, no jewels."

"My thanks! Who's in there?"

"My daughter: she's but a child."

"Then . . . I leave you the most precious of your accouterments. . . ."

A pale, blond head leant from the open coach, with two pretty blue, curious, peering eyes, and a small hand grasped the gentleman's sleeve. "Father," asked a young, frightened voice, "is that man the ghost they talked about at the Inns, who haunts the hills—the bandit ghost, Father?"

"Peace, child! Well, Sire, may we go?"

"But soft!" To the child Boyle said kindly, "Filly, I am but a collector of revenues. I have never met the spook of whom you speak, though, in sooth, I've heard his name. But you'll cloud your pretty face, thinking too much on ghosts. Better forget them, like me, my pretty dear. . . . Sire, you are at liberty to go. . . . Quick, whelp!"

The blond head vanished, and the gentleman regained his seat and slammed shut the door; the coachman whipped his horses on, too glad to go to resent the sobriquet "whelp" applied by Boyle.

Boyle heeled his sable, then gave him free rein. He wished the child had not spoken of the ghost, for Boyle did not believe in ghosts. Far forward he leant, and low-hanging branches threatened his hat. Once his cloak caught in brambles, and roughly tore loose again. The sharp wind was pleasing, biting at his hollow cheeks. Boyle was horribly emaciated: he was a sportive man, who drank and loved too much.

Night resumed its somber sounds: the chirping of tiny nocturnal insects; from somewhere away the hungry bay of a wolf; above, a screech-owl voiced its curdling sound. Boyle's horse drew back, affrighted; then, at a reassuring word from Boyle, moved on.

Suddenly he drew him in. This was a clearing in the wood, and the moon seemed suddenly more bright. Boyle was perplexed, and lost; he did not know this place. Strange! his horse had led him astray, though the beast knew so well the way from the road, through almost imperceptible paths in the thick wood, to the cabin that Boyle at present occupied.

A formation of trees, beyond the clearing, fascinated him: the moon shone full upon it, making strange shadows in the grass below. Sparse near the trunk, two trees stretched out long arms—chill and bare arms that touched, and seemed one lengthened arm. It looked like a gibbet, and, through some monstrous fantasy—caused, perhaps, by branches and leaves of trees beyond—the shadow on the sward enhanced this effect, and added a shadow like a man's, which seemed gently to move, to swing.

Affrighted, Boyle's horse drew back, and chawed his bit, and pawed with his forefeet, and rolled his flank. Boyle held him in, and perspiration beaded his brow: he saw that the horse was innocent of the trees and their fantasmagoria; that the beast was alarmed at something more subtle, something Boyle had not yet sensed.

"Soft, Ned!"

The beast was still: he trusted Boyle's intelligence.

"Stand and deliver, Sire!" The command came from behind him—a soft modulation, in courteous, almost tender tones, but hollow, somber, chilling; they seemed the voice of another world; the sentence seemed to come unwillingly, as though its author spoke against inclination, did something repugnant that seemed expected of him.

Boyle wheeled his horse. Before him, in the full moonlight, another horseman stood. His mount was snow-white, and fleshy, but looked fleet. Its rider was cloaked and masked, yet under the mask was a mat-white skull—a skull that did not grin, but held its jaws tight-set. A wisp of mustache adhered to where the upper lip had been. Dark, burning, liquid points shone through the mask slits; and the velvet hat was drawn too low for a forehead to be seen. Straight in his saddle the specter stood, holding his pistol muzzle toward Boyle's breast. He pulled his cloak about his waist, as though those fleshless ribs were chill. Boyle knew the saga of this one; knew that he had been hanged a hundred years before.

Boyle moaned: "The Ghost! . . . the devil! . . . the Ghost!"

Instinctively his hand reached down—a nervous, shaking, groping hand—and drew the pistol from his boot. A chill crept along his spine; his jaw gaped; his tongue slid out, strangely parched, and back again. His teeth chattered.

Clack-click! his pistol hammer made an awesome sound that seemed very loud. He swung the muzzle toward the other's head, and touched the trigger. Ned plunged at the sharp report, but the white steed stood nonchalantly, unperturbed. A little whiff of smoke cleared in the wind. The specter wiped the back of a hand across his brow, then leveled his pistol at Boyle's head, but refrained from firing it. Boyle was an excellent shot; he knew, despite his nervousness, that his bullet had struck his adversary between the eyes. He shoved his pistol into his boot.

Spectral and cool came the lamenting command: "Stand and deliver, Sire!"

A hand of white, glaring bones stretched out, and grasped the little leathern bag proffered by Boyle's outstretched, quavering palm.

"Sire, you are at liberty to go: but quickly, Sire!"

There was no sound from the white steed's quick hoofs as he wheeled and hurried his ghastly rider away—a rider who seemed not to stoop before low-hanging limbs, but who stayed in his saddle as he rode. Boyle was alone.

How long he waited there, trembling, is problematical. Drawing his pistol, he reloaded it and played nervously with the hammer. Ned was still, but a cold sweat covered him. Boyle looked again toward the trees that had startled him: they seemed but trees.

Then he spoke softly to Ned, heeled him on, riding gently, his weapon across his chest.

Then he laughed harshly, as Ned swung into a trot, at last free of that spectral clearing and the things it had held: "Soft, Ned, good horse! . . . I hope Mag's in tender mood tonight . . . I hope she has some hot punch on . . . in sooth, we can hand her nothing that jingles tonight, old horse!"

The Honor of Don Pedro

by Wallace J. Knapp

Nothing appeared to be unusual about Major Stuart d'Aubigny as he stood in the plaza of Toledo, immaculate from the yellow collar of his blue uniform to where his trousers tucked into his cavalry boots, yet his three friends stared at him in bewilderment.

"You mean you were the—the guest last night of a Spanish *señora*?" Coarse-looking Captain Poiret of the artillery rubbed his tongue over his thick lips. "But where was her husband?"

"He did not interfere."

The hazel eyes of sleek Captain Jules Marteau, attached to the French staff, gleamed in amazement.

"*Mais, mon ami,*" he burst forth, "I know these Spaniards, I. For three years I fight here to help Napoleon keep King Joseph on the throne, but never have I heard of a Spanish don willingly permitting another man to visit his wife. Is he, perhaps, a friend of your family?"

Until now, Major d'Aubigny might have been called handsome. In his face, as well as in his name, lurked evidence of the romance of a bygone Scotch soldier of fortune with a demoiselle of the d'Aubigny family. Fair-haired, taller than most of the Frenchmen in that army in Toledo making its final stand against Wellington's combined British, Portuguese and Spanish force, he had always been sure of a smile from even the black-eyed *señoritas* who hated the foreign intruders. But none of them would have dreamed romance, seeing the black look of hatred now on his face.

"Friend?" he exploded. "He's the worst enemy our family ever had, the treacherous beast! He stole the sweetheart of an ancestor of mine. He used her to get French military secrets which he and the Great Captain used to defeat my country. Indeed he is no friend."

"Yet he let you visit his wife," Marteau insisted.

Before Major d'Aubigny could explain, the fourth member of that little group in the Zocodover interrupted. Jesus-Marie Constans—the sort that could give grace and charm even to a misfit lieutenant's uni-

form—brought his gaze reluctantly back from the winding Tagus River, seen over the walls of the market place.

"But El Gran Capitán is of the Sixteenth Century," he pointed out.

"This happened in 1503," the major agreed calmly.

Captain Poirot's head came back with such a jerk that he almost displaced his eye-glasses.

"The husband of the *señora* alive in 1503!" he cried. "What is this, a joke? How old is your companion of last night?"

"What matters her age if she be beautiful?"

Lieutenant Constans nodded slightly. Rumor had it that while still a student in Paris he had published a remarkable volume of lyrics whose imaginative charm still stood in the way of his military advancement, blinding his superiors to his bravery in battle. His wide-set, baby blue eyes looked anything but war-like.

"Tell us about her," he begged.

"What can I tell?"

"How did you happen to meet her?" Captain Poirot showed his crooked teeth in a grin of anticipation.

"When we arrived last night, we found you early comers had all the good quarters. They billeted my cavalry in a church beyond the Alcazar, a gloomy old ruin. The moment I stepped inside, I had a queer feeling like—well, once sailing home from the Indies I had the same feeling just before a tornado struck our ship. I get these warnings sometimes."

"Perhaps you owe it to your ancestors. The Scotch have always been fey," Constans remarked, but Poirot glared through his glasses.

"Something exciting is sure to happen," the major went on. "That's why I couldn't sleep. I had a place between a couple of tombs in a little chapel, but I just tossed and turned. Then I was conscious of someone crouching in the shadows. I couldn't see clearly. There was a spear of moonlight on the floor between us. I thought it might be a rebel Spaniard waiting to kill me, and here I lay unarmed. Even my cavalry sword I'd left with the rest of our weapons near the door. I drew my legs stealthily up under me, but before I leaped, either some of the guard threw more fuel on the fire or my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Anyway, I suddenly realized it was a woman, kneeling in prayer. She seemed slim, and from the angle of her head, young."

"Young?" echoed Marteau. "Didn't you say her husband—Sixteenth Century—is this a ghost story?"

Poirot, polishing his glasses, growled.

"It better not be!"

"But what was she doing in the church?" asked Constans.

"That I couldn't imagine at first. Why would a Spanish *señora* visit a church full of billeted soldiers? Then I realized. This chapel was the shrine, probably, of her patron saint."

"And I suppose she was beautiful." Poiret, the artillery captain, licked his lips.

For a moment, that winter afternoon in 1812, the major remained silent, watching an ox-cart with wheels taller than his six feet of muscular perfection. After it had squeezed into one of the narrow streets opening off Toledo's main plaza, he nodded as though to himself.

"You would not believe my description," he announced. "I shall let you see her. Tonight we'll have a banquet at which she shall be the guest of honor. It will be my revenge."

All three of them echoed the last word.

"Yes, revenge. Her treacherous husband almost lost to my ancestor the patronage of Louis. I was going to put an end to his boasting about it. If you will be witnesses this evening, I agree. Among the regimental baggage I discovered a case or two of champagne, and if you like sherry—well, *messieurs*, shall we meet here in the Zocodover at eleven tonight and go to banquet with the *señora* Dorotea de Donoso?"

At their nod of agreement, he waved a casual salute and turned away.

His three friends watched him descend the sloping street past the inn where once Cervantes had lived. Marteau gave a characteristic shrug.

"Impossible!" he murmured. "She won't come tonight. The Spanish women are better guarded than Napoleon's diamonds."

Constans drew a long breath.

"Dorotea de Donoso," he repeated, rolling the syllables on his tongue like a savory morsel. "No wonder they call Spain the Land of Romance. Why, even the names of the people embody its poetry and imagination."

"Well, that story of the major's better not be imagination," Poiret growled. "If it's a joke, I'll call him out and shoot him."

"We'll all massacre him," Marteau agreed. "No matter how much champagne he gives me, I'll never forgive him if he makes a fool out of me. I almost believe his story."

"I do believe it." Constans' handsome face was serious. "Stuart met someone last night who made a tremendous impression. I noticed the change the first moment I saw him."

"I, too," Marteau agreed. "But I thought he was tired from the ride."

"And now we know it was insomnia," Poirot leered. "You know the Spanish proverb: 'Insomnia near a beautiful woman is the gift of Heaven.' I hope we see something worth while tonight."

"We shall," Constans promised, and there was a far-away look in his blue eyes.



Through the cobbled streets of Toledo, so narrow that cart hubs had worn ruts in the walls on either side, Major d'Aubigny guided his three guests about midnight, with a full moon trying to cast light into the canyons between the adobe houses. Of the *señoritas* leaning over the mantilla-draped balconies, few smiled and none spoke, since most of the inhabitants of Toledo sided with Wellington and hoped to throw off Napoleonic domination.

The officers still kept looking at him askance, half suspecting the whole thing was a joke. And when they reached the ruined church, it looked as though they had grounds for their suspicions. The sentinel, standing stiffly at the door, directed them into a gloomy place where canvas and blankets curtained off even those windows behind which the moon should be visible.

Their boots echoed hollowly as they clanked across the stone floor to a table set before the great altar. A few smoking lanterns and a half-dozen candles on the table let them barely make out the bottles and glasses. They sat on carved larchwood choir benches, the only wood that had escaped the bonfires.

"But where's the *señora*?" Captain Poirot demanded with a grin that revealed his disfiguring teeth. "Will she come?"

"She'll be here." The calm assurance of the major's voice fell upon them like a chill. "It is not time yet for you to meet her."

"But you weren't serious about her husband being a general back in the time of the Gran Capitán?" he persisted.

"When you have seen her, I'll explain."

"See?" grumbled the artillery officer. "How do you expect us to see her when I can't see my hand before my face?"

"When the time comes, there will be plenty of light, too," their host promised, but Marteau had already begun to feel creepy. Quite the opposite of the major in appearance, small and dark, for he claimed no Scotch ancestors, fiery and hot-tempered, he displayed his lack of

orderliness in the bagginess of his trousers and the careless way his coat was buttoned. But he was no fool. He had begun to suspect that something was wrong in the ruined, gloomy church. He remembered the report of some Spanish rebels who had poisoned a roomful of French invaders, invited to a banquet, and had burned the dwelling. Could it be that d'Aubigny had gone crazy or had sold out to the rebels?

The popping of champagne corks brought him out of his reverie. Even the feeble light let him admire the deft way their host thumbed out the stoppers and let the sparkling liquor cascade into their glasses. After one taste, Marteau felt that he would be willing to toast with such nectar the ugliest of Spanish matrons and at d'Aubigny's behest hail her as queen of love and beauty. Then he noticed that Constans was not emptying his goblet as frequently as the others did.

"Drink! Drink, *mon ami*," he urged.

"I am waiting for *la doña* Dorotea," the lieutenant barely whispered, his blue eyes seeming to look into the future.

"All in time," the major promised. "Moonlight is the light for love. In the moonlight you shall see her, and after that, my revenge." He looked up at one of the curtained windows. "Time for one more glass," he calculated. "To the loveliest lady in the world."

"More beautiful because she is the wife of an enemy," Poiret cackled.

"Shut up!" Constans almost spit at him.

With meaningless laughter Marteau and the artillery officer arose unsteadily to drink the toast. Then Major d'Aubigny caught up one of the candles.

"And now, *messieurs*, to My Lady's sleeping-chambers."

The others, only slightly more sure of their footing, serpentined after him toward the little chapel. At the stone railing he stopped them with a gesture and went on alone. Stopping before the window, he reached up and with a single tug tore away the curtain stretched across the colored glass.

He had calculated well. Like a theatrical spotlight, the moonlight streamed in to pick out a lady kneeling on a tomb. From the other side of the railing came a burst of ribald laughter.

"A damned monument!" shouted Marteau.

"In love with a statue!" scoffed Poiret, showing his crooked teeth, but Lieutenant Constans caught his breath.

"Lovely!" he whispered. "Under the moonlight, she might be flesh and blood."

"So she's the woman who married the conqueror of your ances-

tor?" cackled Marteau. "What a pity she isn't alive! Plenty of ways you could have had a very enjoyable revenge.

"And under her husband's eyes at that," added the artillery officer.

"He looks as though he guarded her even in death," Constans mused. And indeed, as their eyes became accustomed to the light, they could see the armored figure on the tomb next to hers, his gauntleted hands resting on his sword and a strained, watchful look upon his face turned in her direction.

They chattered with liquor-loosened tongues.

"What do you think of my last night's companion?" the major finally demanded.

"He whose chisel created her was a genius," Constans declared. "I can understand why Pygmalion hoped to bring his statue to life with a kiss."

"A kiss," laughed d'Aubigny, and then more violently: "That's it, a kiss. A kiss with her husband, the grandee, looking on. Watch, you dullards. Learn how a beautiful Spanish *señora* should be loved."

He tottered toward her, but Constans, vaulting over the railing, was at his side, clutching his shoulder.

"Don't be a fool," he cried. "Don't insult the dead!"

"Insult? I wish I could. But my kisses are no insult to a lovely woman."

"Her husband was a Spanish grandee," the lieutenant insisted, "and you know how Spaniards worship family honor."

"Don't we French regard our family honor?" the major snarled. "Here. Look at this. You read Spanish, don't you?"

With a finger trembling with rage, he followed along the inscription on the tomb, picked out by the moonlight.

AQUI YACE DON PEDRO DONOSO
GUERRERO CABALLERO

"And see what else it says: 'Whose victory at the Garigliano in 1503 brought dominion to his king and honor to himself.' *Caballero*, is he, when he stole another man's sweetheart? And great warrior when he learned by treachery all his enemy's plans? When I saw his monument last night, I knew I was fated to avenge my ancestor. I made up my mind to despoil this boasting monument before I left, but you have shown me a better way. I hope that from wherever Spanish warriors go, he is looking down to see how I take my revenge."

"You're drunk, Stuart," Constans told him, "or you'd never so

debase yourself. The man's dead. You're not insulting him. It's a crime against lovely womanhood to pollute that statue with your beastly caresses."

"*Vive la France!*" Marteau called out in a cracked voice. "Down with the dons!"

The major flung off Constans' restraining hand.

"Look down, don Pedro Donoso. The d'Aubigny are revenged." He took a step nearer that miracle in marble. "Come, *señora!* Forget your decrepit old Spanish husband. Show me how warm-blooded Spanish maidens love."

One more step he took, between the tombs, then half turned his head to mock the kneeling caballero behind him.

"Watch, cuckold!" he jeered. "My revenge is complete. Now boast your honor of a grandee, if you can."

He bent to kiss the kneeling woman.

Only Constans saw what happened next. The artillery officer had his glasses off and was polishing them. Marteau had turned for a goblet of wine to toast the occasion and the next he knew Major d'Aubigny lay dead on the floor of the chapel, his skull bashed in behind.

To the billeted cavalymen who rushed up alarmed by the shouting, Constans explained that their leader had lost his footing and slipped. He realized the impossibility of making those uncouth soldiers believe what his eyes had seen, but even his reason refused to accept. Yet he knew no mere fall could so have crushed the major's head.

A queer, creepy feeling ran up and down his spine as he remembered that scowl darkening don Pedro's brow, and saw that gauntletted hand crash down upon the insulter of his honor. And wasn't there a changed expression in the features of that stone caballero? They had lost that strained, watchful look, and instead there appeared the proud, haughty gaze befitting an honorable grandee.

The House of Shadows

by Mary Elizabeth Counselman

The train pulled up with a noisy jerk and wheeze, and I peered out into the semi-gloom of dusk at the little depot. What was the place?—"Oak Grove." I could read dimly the sign on the station's roof. I sighed wearily. Three days on the train! Lord, I was tired of the lurching roll, the cinders, the scenery flying past my window! I came to a sudden decision and hurried down the aisle to where the conductor was helping an old lady off.

"How long do we stop here?" I asked him quickly.

"About ten minutes, ma'am," he said, and I stepped from the train to the smooth sand in front of the station. So pleasant to walk on firm ground again! I breathed deeply of the spicy winter air, and strolled to the far side of the station. A brisk little wind was whipping my skirts about my legs and blowing wisps of hair into my eyes. I looked idly about at what I could see of Oak Grove. It was a typical small town—a little sleepier than some, a little prettier than most. I wandered a block or two toward the business district, glancing nervously at my watch from time to time. My ten minutes threatened to be up, when I came upon two dogs trying to tear a small kitten to pieces.

I dived into the fray and rescued the kitten, not without a few bites and scratches in the way of service wounds, and put the little animal inside a store doorway. At that moment a long-drawn, it seemed to me derisive, whistle from my train rent the quiet, and as I tore back toward the station I heard it chugging away. I reached the tracks just in time to see the caboose rattling away into the night.

What should I do? Oh, why had I jumped off at this accursed little station? My luggage, everything I possessed except my purse, was on that vanished train, and here I was, marooned in a village I had never heard of before!

Or had I? "Oak Grove" . . . the name had a familiar ring. Oak Grove . . . ah! I had it! My roommate at college two years before had lived in a town called Oak Grove. I darted into the depot.

"Does a Miss Mary Allison live here?" I inquired of the station-master. "Mary Deane Allison?"

I wondered at the peculiar unfathomable look the old man gave me, and at his long silence before he answered my question. "Yes'm," he said slowly, with an odd hesitancy that was very noticeable. "You her kin?"

"No," I smiled. "I went to college with her. I . . . I thought perhaps she might put me up for the night. I've . . . well, I was idiot enough to let my train go off and leave me. Do you . . . is she fixed to put up an unexpected guest, do you know?"

"Well"—again that odd hesitancy—"we've a fair to middlin' hotel here," he evaded. "Maybe you'd rather stay there."

I frowned. Perhaps my old friend had incurred the disapproval of Oak Grove by indiscreet behavior—it seems a very easy thing to do in rural towns. I looked at him coldly.

"Perhaps you can direct me to her house," I said stiffly.

He did so, still with that strange reluctance.

I made my way to the big white house at the far end of town, where I was told Mary Allison lived. Vague memories flitted through my mind of my chum as I had seen her last, a vivacious cheerful girl whose home and family life meant more to her than college. I recalled hazy pictures she had given me of her house, of her parents and a brother whose picture had been on our dresser at school. I found myself hurrying forward with eagerness to see her again and meet that doting family of hers.

I found my way at last to the place, a beautiful old Colonial mansion with tall pillars. The grounds were overgrown with shrubbery and weeds, and the enormous white oaks completely screened the great house from the street, giving it an appearance of hiding from the world. The place was sadly in need of repairs and a gardener's care, but it must have been magnificent at one time.

I mounted the steps and rapped with the heavy brass knocker. At my third knock the massive door swung open a little way, and my college friend stood in the aperture, staring at me without a word. I held out my hand, smiling delightedly, and she took it in a slow incredulous grasp. She was unchanged, I noticed—except, perhaps, that her dancing bright-blue eyes had taken on a vague dreamy look. There was an unnatural quiet about her manner, too, which was not noticeable until she spoke. She stood in the doorway, staring at me with those misty blue eyes for a long moment without speech; then she said slowly, with more amazement than I thought natural, "Liz! Liz!" Her

fingers tightened about my hand as though she were afraid I might suddenly vanish. "It's . . . it's good to see you! Gosh! How . . . why did you come here?" with a queer embarrassment.

"Well, to tell the truth, my train ran off and left me when I got off for a breath of air," I confessed sheepishly. "But I'm glad now that it did . . . remembered you lived here, so here I am!" She merely stared at me strangely, still clutching my hand. "There's no train to Atlanta till ten in the morning." I hesitated, then laughed, "Well, aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Why . . . why, of course," Mary said oddly, as if the idea was strange and had not occurred to her. "Come in!"

I stepped into the great hall, wondering at her queer manner. She had been one of my best friends at college, so why this odd constraint? Not quite as if she did not want me around—more as if it were queer that I should wish to enter her house, as if I were a total stranger, a creature from another planet! I tried to attribute it to the unexpectedness of my visit; yet inwardly I felt this explanation was not sufficient.

"What a beautiful old place!" I exclaimed, with an effort to put her at ease again. Then, as the complete silence of the place struck me, unthinkingly I added, "You don't live here alone, do you?"

She gave me the oddest look, one I could not fathom, and replied so softly that I could hardly catch the words, "Oh, no."

I laughed. "Of course! I'm crazy . . . but where is everybody?"

I took off my hat, looking about me at the Colonial furniture and the large candelabra on the walls with the clusters of lighted candles which gave the only light in the place—for there were no modern lighting fixtures of any kind, I noted. The dim candle-light threw deep shadows about the hall—shadows that flickered and moved, that seemed alive. It should have given me a sense of nervous fear; yet somehow there was peace, contentment, warmth about the old mansion. Yet, too, there was an incongruous air of mystery, of unseen things in the shadowy corners, of being watched by unseen eyes.

"Where is everybody? Gone to bed?" I repeated, as she seemed not to have heard my question.

"Here they are," Mary answered in that strange hushed voice I had noticed, as if some one were asleep whom she might waken.

I looked in the direction she indicated, and started slightly. I had not seen that little group when I entered! They were standing scarcely ten feet from me just beyond the aura of light from the candles, and they stared at me silently, huddled together and motionless.

I smiled and glanced at Mary, who said in a soft voice like the murmur of a light wind, "My mother . . ."

I stepped forward and held out my hand to the tall kind-faced woman who advanced a few steps from the half-seen group in the shadows. She seemed, without offense, not to see my hand, but merely gave me a beautiful smile and said, in that same hushed voice Mary used, "If you are my daughter's friend, you are welcome!"

I happened to glance at Mary from the corner of my eye as she spoke, and I saw my friend's unnatural constraint vanish, give place to a look, I thought wonderingly, that was unmistakably one of relief.

"My father," Mary's voice had a peculiar tone of happiness. A tall distinguished-looking man of about forty stepped toward me, smiling gently. He too seemed not to see my outthrust hand, but said in a quiet friendly voice, "I am glad to know you, my dear. Mary has spoken of you often."

I made some friendly answer to the old couple; then Mary said, "This is Lonny . . . remember his picture?"

The handsome young man whose photograph I remembered stepped forward, grinning engagingly.

"So this is Liz!" he said. "Always wanted to meet one girl who isn't afraid of a mouse . . . remember? Mary told us about the time you put one in the prof's desk." He too spoke in that near-whisper that went oddly with his cheery words, and I found myself unconsciously lowering my voice to match theirs. They were unusually quiet for such a merry friendly group, and I was especially puzzled at Mary's hushed voice and manner—she had always been a boisterous tomboy sort of person.

"This is Betty," Mary spoke again, a strange glow lighting her face.

A small girl about twelve stepped solemnly from the shadows and gave me a grave old-fashioned curtsy.

"And Bill," said Mary, as a chubby child peeped out at me from behind his sister's dress and broke into a soft gurgling laugh.

"What darling kids!" I burst out.

The baby toddled out from behind Betty and stood looking at me with big blue eyes, head on one side. I stepped forward to pat the curly head, but as I put out a hand to touch him, he seemed to draw away easily just out of reach. I could not feel rebuffed, however, with his bright eyes telling me plainly that I was liked. It was just a baby's natural shyness with strangers, I told myself, and made no other attempt to catch him.

After a moment's conversation, during which my liking for this charming family grew, Mary asked if I should like to go to my room and freshen up a bit before dinner. As I followed her up the stairs, it

struck me forcibly—as it had before only vaguely—that this family, with the exception of Mary, were in very bad health. From father to baby, they were most pasty-white of complexion—not sallow, I mused, but a sort of translucent white like the glazed-glass doors of private offices. I attributed it to the uncertain light of the candles that they looked rather smoky, like figures in a movie when the film has become old and faded.

“Dinner at six,” Mary told me, smiling, and left me to remove the travel-stains.

I came downstairs a little before the dinner hour, to find the hall deserted—and, woman-like, I stopped to parade before a large cheval-glass in the wall. It was a huge mirror, reflecting the whole hall behind me, mellowly illumined in the glow of the candles. Turning about for a back-view of myself, I saw the little baby, Bill, standing just beside me, big eyes twinkling merrily.

“Hello there, old fellow,” I smiled at him. “Do I look all right?” I glanced back at the mirror . . . and what it reflected gave me a shock.

I could see myself clearly in the big glass, and most of the hall far behind me, stretching back into the shadows. But the baby was not reflected in the glass at all! I moved, with a little chill, just behind him . . . and I could see my own reflection clearly, but it was as if he was simply not there.

At that moment Mary called us to dinner, and I promptly forgot the disturbing optical illusion with the parting resolve to have my eyes examined. I held out my hand to lead little Bill into the dining-room, but he dodged by me with a mischievous gurgle of laughter, and toddled into the room ahead of me.

That was the pleasantest meal I can remember. The food was excellent and the conversation cheery and light, though I had to strain to catch words spoken at the far end of the table, as they still spoke in that queer hushed tone. My voice, breaking into the murmur of theirs, sounded loud and discordant, though I have a real Southern voice.

Mary served the dinner, hopping up and running back into the kitchen from time to time to fetch things. By this I gathered that they were in rather straitened circumstances and could not afford a servant. I chattered gayly to Lonny and Mary, while the baby and Betty listened with obvious delight and Mary’s parents put in a word occasionally when they could break into our chatter.

It was a merry informal dinner, not unusual except that the conversation was carried on in that near-whisper. I noticed vaguely that Mary and I were the only ones who ate anything at all. The others merely

toyed with their food, cutting it up ready for eating but not tasting a bite, though several times they would raise a fork to their lips and put it down again, as though pretending to eat. Even the baby only splashed with his little fork in his rice and kept his eyes fixed on me, now and then breaking into that merry gurgling laugh.

We wandered into the library after the meal, where Mary and I chatted of old times. Mr. Allison and his wife read or gave ear to our prattling from time to time, smiling and winking at each other. Lonny, with the baby in his lap and Betty perched on the arm of his chair, laughed with us at some foolish tale of our freshman days.

At about eleven Mary caught me yawning covertly, and hustled me off to bed. I obediently retired, thankful for a bed that did not roll me from side to side all night, and crawled in bed in borrowed pajamas with a book, to read myself to sleep by the flickering candle on my bedside table.

I must have dropped off to sleep suddenly, for I awoke to find my candle still burning. I was about to blow it out and go back to sleep when a slight sound startled the last trace of drowsiness from me.

It was the gentle rattle of my doorknob being turned very quietly.

An impulse made me feign sleep, though my eyes were not quite closed and I watched the door through my eyelashes. It swung open slowly, and Mrs. Allison came into the room. She walked with absolute noiselessness up to my bed, and stood looking down at me intently. I shut my eyes tightly so my eyelids would not flutter, and when I opened them slightly in a moment, she was moving toward the door, apparently satisfied that I was fast asleep. I thought she was going out again, but she paused at the door and beckoned to some one outside in the hall.

Slowly and with incredible lack of sound, there tiptoed into my room Mr. Allison, Lonny, Betty, and the baby. They stood beside the bed looking down at me with such tender expressions that I was touched.

I conquered an impulse to open my eyes and ask them what they meant by this late visit, deciding to wait and watch. It did not occur to me to be frightened at this midnight intrusion. There swept over me instead a sense of unutterable peace and safety, a feeling of being watched over and guarded by some benevolent angel.

They stood for a long moment without speaking, and then the little girl, bending close to me, gently caressed my hand, which was lying on the coverlet. I controlled a start with great effort.

Her little hand was icy cold—not with the coldness of hands, but

with a peculiar *windy* coldness. It was as if some one had merely blown a breath of icy air on me, for though her hand rested a moment on mine, it had no weight!

Then, still without speaking but with gentle affectionate smiles on all their faces, they tiptoed out in single file. Wondering at their actions, I dropped off at last into a serene sleep.

Mary brought my breakfast to my bed next morning, and sat chattering with me while I ate. I dressed leisurely and made ready to catch my ten o'clock train. When the time drew near, I asked Mary where her family was—they were nowhere in the house and I had seen none of them since the night before. I reiterated how charming they were, and how happy my visit had been. That little glow of happiness lighted my friend's face again, but at my next words it vanished into one that was certainly frightened pleading. I had merely asked to tell them good-bye.

That odd unfathomable expression flitted across her face once more. "They . . . they're gone," she said in a strained whisper. And as I stared at her perplexedly, she added in confusion, "I . . . I mean, they're away. They won't be back until . . . nightfall," the last word was so low it was almost unintelligible.

So I told her to give them my thanks and farewells. She did not seem to want to accompany me to the train, so I went alone. My train was late, and I wandered to the ticket window and chatted with the station-master.

"Miss Allison has a charming family, hasn't she?" I began conversationally. "They seem so devoted to each other."

Then I saw the station-master was staring at me as if I had suddenly gone mad. His wrinkled face had gone very pale.

"You stayed there last night?" His voice was almost a croak.

"Why, yes!" I replied, wondering at his behavior. "I did. Why not?"

"And . . . you saw . . . *them*?" his voice sank to a whisper.

"You mean Mary's family?" I asked, becoming a little annoyed at his foolish perturbation. "Certainly I saw them! What's so strange about that? What's wrong with them?"

My approaching train wailed in the distance, but I lingered to hear his reply. It came with that same reluctance, that same hesitancy, after a long moment.

"They died last year," he whispered, leaning forward toward me and fixing me with wide intent eyes. "Wiped out—every one of 'em exceptin' Mary—by smallpox."

How He Left the Hotel

by Louisa Baldwin

I used to work the passenger lift in the Empire Hotel, that big block of building in lines of red and white brick like streaky bacon, that stands at the corner of Bath Street. I'd served my time in the army and got my discharge with good conduct stripes, and how I got the job was in this way. The hotel was a big company affair, with a managing committee of retired officers and such like, gentlemen with a bit o' money in the concern and nothing to do but fidget about it, and my late Colonel was one of 'em. He was as good tempered a man as ever stepped when his will wasn't crossed, and when I asked him for a job, "Mole," says he, "you're the very man to work the lift at our big hotel. Soldiers are civil and business-like, and the public like 'em only second best to sailors. We've had to give our last man the sack, and you can take his place."

I liked my work well enough and my pay, and kept my place a year, and I should have been there still if it hadn't been for a circumstance—but more about that just now. Ours was a hydraulic lift. None o' them ricketty things swung up like a poll-parrot's cage in a well staircase, that I shouldn't care to trust my neck to. It ran as smooth as oil, a child might have worked it, and safe as standing on the ground. Instead of being stuck full of advertisements like a' omnibus, we'd mirrors in it, and the ladies would look at themselves, and pat their hair, and set their mouths when I was taking 'em downstairs dressed of an evening. It was a little sitting room with red velvet cushions to sit down on, and you'd nothing to do but get into it, and it 'ud float you up, or float you down, as light as a bird.

All the visitors used the lift one time or another, going up or coming down. Some of them was French, and they called the lift the "as-senser," and good enough for them in their language no doubt, but why the Americans, that can speak English when they choose, and are always finding out ways o' doing things quicker than other folks, should waste time and breath calling a lift an "elevator," I can't make out.

I was in charge of the lift from noon till midnight. By that time the theatre and dining-out folks had come in, and any one returning later walked upstairs, for my day's work was done. One of the porters worked the lift till I came on duty in the morning, but before twelve there was nothing particular going on, and not much till after two o'clock. Then it was pretty hot work with visitors going up and down constant, and the electric bell ringing you from one floor to another like a house on fire. Then came a quiet spell while dinner was on, and I'd sit down comfortable in the lift and read my paper, only I mightn't smoke. But nobody else might neither, and I had to ask furren gentlemen to please not to smoke in it, it was against the rule. I hadn't so often to tell English gentlemen. They're not like furreners, that seem as if their cigars was glued to their lips.

I always noticed faces as folks got into the lift, for I've sharp sight and a good memory, and none of the visitors needed to tell me twice where to take them. I knew them, and I knew their floor as well as they did themselves.

It was in November that Colonel Saxby came to the Empire Hotel. I noticed him particularly because you could see at once that he was a soldier. He was a tall, thin man about fifty, with a hawk nose, keen eyes, and a grey moustache, and walked stiff from a gunshot wound in the knee. But what I noticed most was the scar of a sabre cut across the right side of the face. As he got in the lift to go to his room on the fourth floor, I thought what a difference there is among officers. Colonel Saxby put me in mind of a telegraph post for height and thinness, and my old Colonel was like a barrel in uniform, but a brave soldier and a gentleman all the same. Colonel Saxby's room was number 210, just opposite the glass door leading to the lift, and every time I stopped on the fourth floor Number 210 stared me in the face.

The Colonel used to go up in the lift every day regular, though he never came down in it, till—but I'm coming to that presently. Sometimes, when we was alone in the lift, he'd speak to me. He asked me in what regiment I'd served, and said he knew the officers in it. But I can't say he was comfortable to talk to. There was something stand off about him, and he always seemed deep in his own thoughts. He never sat down in the lift. Whether it was empty or full he stood bolt upright, under the lamp, where the light fell on his pale face and scarred cheek.

One day in February I didn't take the Colonel up in the lift, and as he was regular as clockwork, I noticed it, but I supposed he'd gone away for a few days, and I thought no more about it. Whenever I stopped on the fourth floor the door of Number 210 was shut, and as he often left it open, I made sure the Colonel was away. At the end of a

week I heard a chambermaid say that Colonel Saxby was ill, so thinks I that's why he hadn't been in the lift lately.

It was a Tuesday night, and I'd had an uncommonly busy time of it. It was one stream of traffic up and down, and so it went on the whole evening. It was on the stroke of midnight, and I was about to put out the light in the lift, lock the door, and leave the key in the office for the man in the morning, when the electric bell rang out sharp. I looked at the dial, and saw I was wanted on the fourth floor. It struck twelve as I stepped into the lift. As I past the second and third floors I wondered who it was that had rung so late, and thought it must be a stranger that didn't know the rule of the house. But when I stopped at the fourth floor and flung open the door of the lift, Colonel Saxby was standing there wrapped in his military cloak. His room door was shut behind him, for I read the number on it. I thought he was ill in his bed, and ill enough he looked, but he had his hat on, and what could a man that had been in bed ten days want with going out on a winter midnight? I don't think he saw me, but when I'd set the lift in motion, I looked at him standing under the lamp, with the shadow of his hat hiding his eyes, and the light full on the lower part of his face that was deadly pale, the scar on his cheek showing still paler.

"Glad to see you're better, sir," but he said nothing, and I didn't like to look at him again. He stood like a statue with his cloak about him, and I was downright glad when I opened the door for him to step out in the hall. I saluted as he got out, and he went past me towards the door.

"The Colonel wants to go out," I said to the porter who stood staring. He opened the front door and Colonel Saxby walked out into the snow.

"That's a queer go," said the porter.

"It is," said I. "I don't like the Colonel's looks; he doesn't seem himself at all. He's ill enough to be in his bed, and there he is, gone out on a night like this."

"Anyhow he's got a famous cloak to keep him warm. I say, supposing he's gone to a fancy ball and got that cloak on to hide his dress," said the porter, laughing uneasily. For we both felt queerer than we cared to say, and as we spoke there came a loud ring at the door bell.

"No more passengers for me," I said, and I was really putting the light out this time, when Joe opened the door and two gentlemen entered that I knew at a glance were doctors. One was tall and the other short and stout, and they both came to the lift.

"Sorry, gentlemen, but it's against the rule for the lift to go up after midnight."

"Nonsense!" said the stout gentleman, "it's only just past twelve, and it's a matter of life and death. Take us up at once to the fourth floor," and they were in the lift like a shot.

When I opened the door, they went straight to Number 210. A nurse came out to meet them, and the stout doctor said, "No change for the worse, I hope." And I heard her reply, "The patient died five minutes ago, sir."

Though I'd no business to speak, that was more than I could stand. I followed the doctors to the door and said, "There's some mistake here, gentlemen; I took the Colonel down in the lift since the clock struck twelve, and he went out."

The stout doctor said sharply, "A case of mistaken identity. It was someone else you took for the Colonel."

"Begging your pardon, gentlemen, it was the Colonel himself, and the night porter that opened the door for him knew him as well as me. He was dressed for a night like this, with his military cloak wrapped round him."

"Step in and see for yourself," said the nurse. I followed the doctors into the room, and there lay Colonel Saxby looking just as I'd seen him a few minutes before. There he lay, dead as his forefathers, and the great cloak spread over the bed to keep him warm that would feel heat and cold no more. I never slept that night. I sat up with Joe, expecting every minute to hear the Colonel ring the front door bell. Next day every time the bell for the lift rang sharp and sudden, the sweat broke out on me and I shook again. I felt as bad as I did the first time I was in action. Me and Joe told the manager all about it, and he said we'd been dreaming, but, said he, "Mind you, don't you talk about it, or the house'll be empty in a week."

The Colonel's coffin was smuggled into the house the next night. Me and the manager, and the undertaker's men, took it up in the lift, and it lay right across it, and not an inch to spare. They carried it into Number 210, and while I waited for them to come out again, a queer feeling came over me. Then the door opened softly, and six men carried out the long coffin straight across the passage, and set it down with its foot towards the door of the lift, and the manager looked round for me.

"I can't do it, sir," I said. "I can't take the Colonel down *again*, I took him down at midnight yesterday, and that was enough for me."

"Push it in!" said the manager, speaking short and sharp, and they ran the coffin into the lift without a sound. The manager got in last, and before he closed the door he said, "Mole, you've worked this lift

for the last time, it strikes me.” And I had, for I wouldn’t have stayed on at the Empire Hotel after what had happened, not if they’d doubled my wages, and me and the night porter left together.

Jerry Bundler

by W. W. Jacobs

It wanted a few nights to Christmas, a festival for which the small market-town of Torchester was making extensive preparations. The narrow streets which had been thronged with people were now almost deserted; the cheap-jack from London, with the remnant of breath left him after his evening’s exertions, was making feeble attempts to blow out his naphtha lamp, and the last shops open were rapidly closing for the night.

In the comfortable coffee-room of the old “Boar’s Head”, half a dozen guests, principally commercial travellers, sat talking by the light of the fire. The talk had drifted from trade to politics, from politics to religion and so by easy stages to the supernatural. Three ghost stories, never known to fail before, had fallen flat; there was too much noise outside, too much light within. The fourth story was told by an old hand with more success; the streets were quiet, and he had turned the gas out. In the flickering light of the fire, as it shone on the glasses and danced with the shadows on the walls, the story proved so enthralling that George, the waiter, whose presence had been forgotten, created a very disagreeable sensation by suddenly starting up from a dark corner and gliding silently from the room.

“That’s what I call a good story,” said one of the men, sipping his hot whisky. “Of course it’s an old idea that spirits like to get into the company of human beings. A man told me once that he travelled down the Great Western with a ghost, and hadn’t the slightest suspicion of it until the inspector came for tickets. My friend said the way that ghost tried to keep up appearances by feeling for it in all its pockets and looking on the floor was quite touching. Ultimately it gave it up and with a faint groan vanished through the ventilator.”

"That'll do, Hirst," said another man.

"It's not a subject for jesting," said a little old gentleman who had been an attentive listener. "I've never seen an apparition myself, but I know people who have, and I consider that they form a very interesting link between us and the after-life. There's a ghost story connected with this house, you know."

"Never heard of it," said another speaker, "and I've been here some years now."

"It dates back a long time now," said the old gentleman. "You've heard about Jerry Bundler, George?"

"Well, I've just 'eard odds and ends, sir," said the old waiter, "but I never put much count to 'em. There was one chap 'ere what said 'e saw it, and the gov'ner sacked 'im prompt."

"My father was a native of this town," said the old gentleman, "and knew the story well. He was a truthful man and a steady churchgoer, but I've heard him declare that once in his life he saw the appearance of Jerry Bundler in this house."

"And who was this Bundler?" inquired a voice.

"A London thief, pickpocket, highwayman—anything he could turn his dishonest hand to," replied the old gentleman; "and he was run to earth in this house one Christmas week some eighty years ago. He took his last supper in this very room, and after he had gone up to bed a couple of Bow Street runners, who had followed him from London but lost the scent a bit, went upstairs with the landlord and tried the door. It was stout oak, and fast, so one went into the yard, and by means of a short ladder got on to the window-sill, while the other stayed outside the door. Those below in the yard saw the man crouching on the sill, and then there was a sudden smash of glass, and with a cry he fell in a heap on the stones at their feet. Then in the moonlight they saw the white face of the pickpocket peeping over the sill, and while some stayed in the yard, others ran into the house and helped the other man to break the door in. It was difficult to obtain an entrance even then, for it was barred with heavy furniture, but they got in at last, and the first thing that met their eyes was the body of Jerry dangling from the top of the bed by his own handkerchief."

"Which bedroom was it?" asked two or three voices together.

The narrator shook his head. "That I can't tell you; but the story goes that Jerry still haunts this house, and my father used to declare positively that the last time he slept here the ghost of Jerry Bundler lowered itself from the top of his bed and tried to strangle him."

"That'll do," said an uneasy voice. "I wish you'd thought to ask your father which bedroom it was."

"What for?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Well, I should take care not to sleep in it, that's all," said the voice, shortly.

"There's nothing to fear," said the other. "I don't believe for a moment that ghosts could really hurt one. In fact my father used to confess that it was only the unpleasantness of the thing that upset him, and that for all practical purposes, Jerry's fingers might have been made of cotton-wool for all the harm they could do."

"That's all very fine," said the last speaker again; "a ghost story is a ghost story, sir; but when a gentleman tells a tale of a ghost in the house in which one is going to sleep, I call it most ungentlemanly!"

"Pooh! nonsense!" said the old gentleman, rising; "ghosts can't hurt you. For my own part, I should rather like to see one. Good night, gentlemen."

"Good night," said the others. "And I only hope Jerry'll pay you a visit," added the nervous man as the door closed.

"Bring some more whisky, George," said a stout commercial; "I want keeping up when the talk turns this way."

"Shall I light the gas, Mr. Malcolm?" said George.

"No; the fire's very comfortable," said the traveller. "Now, gentlemen, any of you know any more?"

"I think we've had enough," said the other man; "we shall be thinking we see spirits next, and we're not all like the old gentleman who's just gone."

"Old humbug!" said Hirst. "I should like to put him to the test. Suppose I dress up as Jerry Bundler and go and give him a chance of displaying his courage?"

"Bravo!" said Malcolm, huskily; drowning one or two faint "Noes." "Just for the joke, gentlemen."

"No, no! Drop it, Hirst," said another man.

"Only for the joke," said Hirst, somewhat eagerly. "I've got some things upstairs in which I am going to play in *The Rivals*—knee-breeches, buckles, and all that sort of thing. It's a rare chance. If you'll wait a bit I'll give you a full dress rehearsal, entitled 'Jerry Bundler; or The Nocturnal Strangler'."

"You won't frighten us," said the commercial, with a husky laugh.

"I don't know that," said Hirst sharply; "it's a question of acting, that's all. I'm pretty good, ain't I, Somers?"

"Oh, you're alright—for an amateur," said his friend, with a laugh.

"I'll bet a level sov. you don't frighten me," said the stout traveller.

"Done!" said Hirst. "I'll take the bet to frighten you first and the old gentleman afterwards. These gentlemen shall be the judges."

"You won't frighten us, sir," said another man, "because we're prepared for you; but you'd better leave the old man alone. It's dangerous play."

"Well, I'll try you first," said Hirst, springing up. "No gas, mind."

He ran lightly upstairs to his room, leaving the others, most of whom had been drinking somewhat freely, to wrangle about his proceedings. It ended in two of them going to bed.

"He's crazy on acting," said Somers, lighting his pipe. "Thinks he's the equal of anybody almost. It doesn't matter with us, but I won't let him go to the old man. And he won't mind so long as he gets an opportunity of acting to us."

"Well, I hope he'll hurry up," said Malcolm yawning; "it's nearly twelve now."

Nearly half an hour passed. Malcolm drew his watch from his pocket and was busy winding it, when George the waiter, who had been sent on an errand to the bar, burst suddenly into the room and rushed towards them.

"'E's comin', gentlemen," he said breathlessly.

"Why, you're frightened, George," said the stout commercial, with a chuckle.

"It was the suddenness of it," said George, sheepishly; "and besides, I didn't look for seein' 'im in the bar. There's only a glimmer of light there, and 'e was sitting on the floor behind the bar. I nearly trod on 'im."

"Oh, you'll never make a man, George," said Malcolm.

"Well, it took me unawares," said the waiter. "Not that I'd have gone to the bar by myself if I'd known 'e was there, and I don't believe you would, either, sir."

"Nonsense," said Malcolm. "I'll go and fetch him in."

"You don't know what it's like, sir," said George, catching him by the sleeve. "It ain't fit to look at by yourself, it ain't, indeed. It's got the—*What's that?*"

They all started at the sound of a smothered cry from the staircase and the sound of somebody running hurriedly along the passage. Before anybody could speak, the door flew open and a figure bursting into the room flung itself gasping and shivering upon them.

"What is it? What's the matter?" demanded Malcolm. "Why, it's Mr. Hirst." He shook him roughly and then held some spirit to his lips. Hirst drank it greedily and with a sharp intake of his breath gripped him by the arm.

"Light the gas, George," said Malcolm.

The waiter obeyed hastily. Hirst, a ludicrous but pitiable figure in

knee-breeches and coat, a large wig all awry, and his face a mess of grease paint, clung to him, trembling.

"Now, what's the matter?" asked Malcolm.

"I've seen it," said Hirst, with a hysterical sob. "O Lord, I'll never play the fool again, never!"

"Seen what?" said the others.

"Him—it—the ghost—anything!" said Hirst, wildly.

"Rot!" said Malcolm, uneasily.

"I was coming down the stairs," said Hirst, "just capering down—as I thought—it ought to do. I felt a tap—"

He broke off suddenly and peered nervously through the open door into the passage.

"I thought I saw it again," he whispered. "Look—at the foot of the stairs. Can you see anything?"

"No, there's nothing there," said Malcolm, whose own voice shook a little. "Go on. You felt a tap on your shoulder—"

"I turned round and saw it—a little wicked head and a white dead face. Pah!"

"That's what I saw in the bar," said George. "'Orrid it was—devilish!"

Hirst shuddered, and, still retaining his nervous grip of Malcolm's sleeve, dropped into a chair.

"Well, it's a most unaccountable thing," said the dumbfounded Malcolm, turning to the others. "It's the last time I come to this house."

"I leave tomorrow," said George. "I wouldn't go down to that bar again by myself, no, not for fifty pounds!"

"It's talking about the thing that's caused it, I expect," said one of the men; "we've all been talking about this and having it in our minds. Practically we've been forming a spiritualistic circle without knowing it."

"Hang the old gentleman!" said Malcolm, heartily. "Upon my soul, I'm half afraid to go to bed. It's odd they should both think they saw something."

"I saw it as plain as I see you, sir," said George, solemnly. "P'raps if you keep your eyes turned up the passage you'll see it for yourself."

They followed the direction of his finger, but saw nothing, although one of them fancied that a head peeped round the corner of the wall.

"Who'll come down to the bar?" said Malcolm, looking round.

"You can go, if you like," said one of the others, with a faint laugh; "we'll wait here for you."

The stout traveller walked towards the door and took a few steps up

the passage. Then he stopped. All was quite silent, and he walked slowly to the end and looked down fearfully towards the glass partition which shut off the bar. Three times he made as though to go to it; then he turned back, and, glancing over his shoulder, came hurriedly back to the room.

"Did you see it, sir?" whispered George.

"Don't know," said Malcolm softly. "I fancied I saw something, but it might have been fancy. I'm in the mood to see anything just now. How are you feeling now, sir?"

"Oh, I feel a bit better now," said Hirst, somewhat brusquely, as all eyes were turned upon him. "I dare say you think I'm easily scared, but you didn't see it."

"Not at all," said Malcolm, smiling faintly despite himself.

"I'm going to bed," said Hirst, noticing the smile and resenting it. "Will you share my room with me, Somers?"

"I will with pleasure," said his friend, "provided you don't mind sleeping with the gas on full all night."

He rose from his seat, and bidding the company a friendly good-night, left the room with his crestfallen friend. The others saw them to the foot of the stairs, and having heard their door close, returned to the coffee-room.

"Well, I suppose the bet's off?" said the stout commercial, poking the fire and then standing with his legs apart on the hearthrug: "though, as far as I can see, I won it. I never saw a man so scared in all my life. Sort of poetic justice about it, isn't there?"

"Never mind about poetry or justice," said one of his listeners; "who's going to sleep with me?"

"I will," said Malcolm affably.

"And I suppose we share a room together, Mr. Leek?" said the third man, turning to the fourth.

"No, thank you," said the other, briskly; "I don't believe in ghosts. If anything comes into my room I shall shoot it."

"That won't hurt a spirit, Leek," said Malcolm, decisively.

"Well, the noise'll be like company to me," said Leek, "and it'll wake the house too. But if you're nervous, sir," he added, with a grin, to the man who had suggested sharing his room, "George'll be only too pleased to sleep on the doormat inside your room, I know."

"That I will, sir," said George fervently; "and if you gentlemen would only come down with me to the bar to put the gas out, I could never be sufficiently grateful."

They went out in a body, with the exception of Leek, peering carefully before them as they went. George turned the light out in the bar

and they returned unmolested to the coffee-room, and, avoiding the sardonic smile of Leek, prepared to separate for the night.

"Give me the candle while you put the gas out, George," said the traveller.

The waiter handed it to him and extinguished the gas, and at the same moment all distinctly heard a step in the passage outside. It stopped at the door, and as they watched with bated breath, the door creaked and slowly opened. Malcolm fell back, open-mouthed, as a white, leering face, with sunken eyeballs and close-cropped bullet head, appeared at the opening.

For a few seconds the creature stood regarding them, blinking in a strange fashion at the candle. Then, with a sidling movement, it came a little way into the room and stood there as if bewildered.

Not a man spoke or moved, but all watched with a horrible fascination as the creature removed its dirty neckcloth and its head rolled on its shoulder. For a minute it paused, and then, holding the rag before it, moved towards Malcolm.

The candle went out suddenly with a flash and a bang. There was a smell of powder, and something writhing in the darkness on the floor. A faint, choking cough, and then silence. Malcolm was the first to speak. "Matches," he said, in a strange voice. George struck one. Then he leapt at the gas and a burner flamed from the match. Malcolm touched the thing on the floor with his foot and found it soft. He looked at his companions. They mouthed inquiries at him, but he shook his head. He lit the candle, and, kneeling down, examined the silent thing on the floor. Then he rose swiftly, and dipping his handkerchief in the water-jug, bent down again and grimly wiped the white face. Then he sprang back with a cry of incredulous horror, pointing at it. Leek's pistol fell to the floor and he shut out the sight with his hands, but the others crowding forward, gazed spellbound at the dead face of Hirst.

Before a word was spoken the door opened and Somers hastily entered the room. His eyes fell on the floor. "Good God!" he cried. "You didn't—"

Nobody spoke.

"I told him not to," he said, in a suffocating voice. "I told him not to. I told him—"

He leaned against the wall, deathly sick, put his arms out feebly, and fell fainting into the traveller's arms.

John Charrington's Wedding

by Edith Nesbit

No one ever thought that May Foster would marry John Charrington; but he thought differently, and things which John Charrington intended should happen had a way of happening. He asked her to marry him before he went up to Oxford. She laughed and refused him. He asked her again next time he came home. Again she laughed, tossed her blonde head, and again refused. A third time he asked her; she said it was becoming a confirmed habit, and laughed at him more than ever.

John was not the only man who wanted to marry her; she was the belle of our village, and we were all in love with her more or less; it was a sort of fashion, like heliotrope ties or Inverness capes. Therefore we were as much annoyed as surprised when John Charrington walked into our little local club—we held it in a loft over the saddler's, I remember—and invited us all to his wedding.

'Your wedding?'

'You don't mean it?'

'Who's the happy fair? When's it to be?'

John Charrington filled his pipe and lighted it before he replied. Then he said:

'I'm sorry to deprive you fellows of your only joke, but Miss Foster and I are to be married in September.'

'You don't mean it?'

'He's got the mitten again, and it's turned his head.'

'No,' I said, rising, 'I see it's true. Lend me a pistol someone, or a first-class fare to the other end of Nowhere. Charrington has bewitched the only pretty girl in our twenty mile radius. Was it mesmerism, or a love-potion, Jack?'

'Neither, sir, but a gift you'll never have—perseverance—and the best luck a man ever had in this world.'

There was something in his voice that silenced me, and all chaff of the other fellows failed to draw him further.

The queer thing about it was that, when we congratulated Miss

Foster, she blushed, and smiled, and dimpled, for all the world as though she were in love with him and had been in love with him all the time. Upon my word, I think she had. Women are strange creatures.

We were all asked to the wedding. In Brixham, every one who was anybody knew everybody else who was anyone. My sisters were, I truly believe, more interested in the *trousseau* than the bride herself, and I was to be best man. The coming marriage was much canvassed at afternoon tea-tables, and at our little club over the saddler's; and the question was always asked: 'Does she care for him?'

I used to ask that question myself in the early days of their engagement, but after a certain evening in August I never asked it again. I was coming home from the club through the churchyard. Our church is on a thyme-grown hill, and the turf about it is so thick and soft that one's footsteps are noiseless.

I made no sound as I vaulted the low wall and threaded my way between the tombstones. It was at the same instant that I heard John Charrington's voice and saw her. May was sitting on a low, flat gravestone, her face turned towards the full splendour of the setting sun. Its expression ended, at once and for ever, any question of love for him; it was transfigured to a beauty I should not have believed possible, even to that beautiful little face.

John lay at her feet, and it was his voice that broke the stillness of the golden August evening.

'My dear, I believe I should come back to you from the dead, if you wanted me!'

I coughed at once to indicate my presence, and passed on into the shadow fully enlightened.

The wedding was to be early in September. Two days before, I had to run up to town on business. The train was late, of course, for we were on the South-Eastern, and as I stood grumbling with my watch in my hand, whom should I see but John Charrington and May Foster. They were walking up and down the unfrequented end of the platform, arm-in-arm, looking into each other's eyes, careless of the sympathetic interest of the porters.

Of course I knew better than to hesitate a moment before burying myself in the booking-office, and it was not till the train drew up at the platform that I obtrusively passed the pair with my Gladstone, and took the corner in a first-class smoking-carriage. I did this with as good an air of not seeing them as I could assume. I pride myself on my discretion, but if John were travelling alone, I wanted his company. I had it.

'Hullo, old man,' came his cheery voice, as he swung his bag into my carriage, 'here's luck. I was expecting a dull journey.'

'Where are you off to?' I asked, discretion still bidding me turn my eyes away, though I saw, without looking, that hers were red-rimmed.

'To old Branbridge's,' he answered, shutting the door, and leaning out for a last word with his sweetheart.

'Oh, I wish you wouldn't go, John,' she was saying in a low, earnest voice. 'I feel certain something will happen.'

'Do you think I should let anything happen to keep me, and the day after tomorrow our wedding day?'

'Don't go,' she answered, with a pleading intensity that would have sent my Gladstone on to the platform, and me after it. But she wasn't speaking to me. John Charrington was made differently—he rarely changed his opinion, never his resolutions.

He just touched the ungloved hands that lay on the carriage door.

'I must, May. The old boy has been awfully good to me, and now he's dying I must go and see him, but I shall come home in time—' The rest of the parting was lost in a whisper and in the rattling lurch of the starting train.

'You're sure to come?' she spoke, as the train moved.

'Nothing shall keep me,' he answered, and we steamed out. After he had seen the last of the little figure on the platform, he leaned back in his corner and kept silence for a minute.

When he spoke it was to explain to me that his godfather, whose heir he was, lay dying at Peasemars Place, some fifty miles away, and he had sent for John, and John had felt bound to go.

'I shall be surely back tomorrow,' he said, 'or, if not, the day after, in heaps of time. Thank Heaven, one hasn't to get up in the middle of the night to get married nowadays.'

'And suppose Mr Branbridge dies?'

'Alive or dead, I mean to be married on Thursday!' John answered, lighting a cigar and unfolding the *Times*.

At Peasemars station we said 'good-bye', and he got out, and I saw him ride off. I went on to London, where I stayed the night.

When I got home the next afternoon, a very wet one, by the way, my sister greeted me with:

'Where's Mr Charrington?'

'Goodness knows,' I answered testily. Every man since Cain has resented that kind of question.

'I thought you might have heard from him,' she went on, 'as you give him away tomorrow.'

'Isn't he back?' I asked, for I had confidently expected to find him at home.

'No, Geoffrey'—my sister always had a way of jumping to conclusions, especially such conclusions as were least favourable to her fellow creatures—'he has not returned, and, what is more, you may depend upon it, he won't. You mark my words, there'll be no wedding tomorrow.'

My sister Fanny has a power of annoying me which no other human being possesses.

'You mark my words,' I retorted with asperity, 'you had better give up making such a thundering idiot of yourself. There'll be more wedding tomorrow than ever you'll take first part in.'

But though I could snarl confidently to my sister, I did not feel so comfortable when, late that night, I, standing on the doorstep of John's house, heard that he had not returned. I went home gloomily through the rain. Next morning brought a brilliant blue sky, gold sun, and all such softness of air and beauty of cloud as go to make a perfect day. I woke with a vague feeling of having gone to bed anxious, and of being rather averse from facing that anxiety in the light of full wakefulness.

With my shaving-water came a letter from John which relieved my mind, and sent me up to the Fosters with a light heart.

May was in the garden. I saw her blue gown among the hollyhocks as the lodge gates swung to behind me. So I did not go up to the house, but turned aside down the turfed path.

'He's written to you too,' she said, without preliminary greeting, when I reached her side.

'Yes, I'm to meet him at the station at three, and come straight on to the church.'

Her face looked pale, but there was a brightness in the eyes and a softness about the mouth that spoke of renewed happiness.

'Mr Branbridge begged him so to stay another night that he had not the heart to refuse,' she went on. 'He is so kind, but . . . I wish he hadn't stayed.'

I was at the station at half-past two. I felt rather annoyed with John. It seemed a sort of slight to the beautiful girl who loved him, that he should come, as it were out of breath, and with the dust of travel upon him, to take her hand, which some of us would have given the best years of our life to take.

But when the three o'clock train glided in and glided out again, having brought no passengers to our little station, I was more than annoyed. There was no other train for thirty-five minutes; I calculated

that, with much hurry, we might just get to the church in time for the ceremony; but, oh, what a fool to miss that first train! What other man would have done it?

The thirty-five minutes seemed a year, as I wandered round the station reading the advertisements and the time-tables and the company's bye-laws, and getting more and more angry with John Charrington. This confidence in his own power of getting everything he wanted the minute he wanted it, was leading him too far.

I hate waiting. Everyone hates waiting, but I believe I hate it more than anyone else does. The three-thirty-five was late too, of course.

I ground my pipe between my teeth and stamped with impatience as I watched the signals. Click. The signal went down. Five minutes later I flung myself into the carriage that I had brought for John.

'Drive to the church!' I said, as some one shut the door. 'Mr Charrington hasn't come by this train.'

Anxiety now replaced anger. What had become of this man? Could he have been taken suddenly ill? I had never known him have a day's illness in his life. And even so he might have telegraphed. Some awful accident must have happened to him. The thought that he had played her false never, no, not for a moment, entered my head. Yes, something terrible had happened to him, and on me lay the task of telling his bride. I almost wished the carriage would upset and break my head, so that someone else might tell her.

It was five minutes to four as we drew up at the churchyard. A double row of eager onlookers lined the path from lych-gate to porch. I sprang from the carriage and passed up between them. Our gardener had a good front place near the door. I stopped.

'Are they still waiting, Byles?' I asked, simply to gain time, for of course I knew they were, by the waiting crowd's attentive attitude.

'Waiting, sir? No, no, sir; why it must be over by now.'

'Over! Then Mr Charrington's come?'

'To the minute, sir; must have missed you somehow, and I say, sir,' lowering his voice, 'I never see Mr John the least bit so afore, but my opinion is he's 'ad more than a drop; I wouldn't be going too far if I said he's been drinking pretty free. His clothes was all dusty and his face like a sheet. I tell you I didn't like the looks of him at all, and the folks inside are saying all sorts of things. You'll see, something's gone very wrong with Mr John, and he's tried liquor. He looked like a ghost, and he went in with his eyes straight before him, with never a look or a word for none of us; him that was always such a gentleman.'

I had never heard Byles make so long a speech. The crowd in the churchyard were talking in whispers, and getting ready rice and slippers

to throw at the bride and bridegroom. The ringers were ready with their hands on the ropes, to ring out the merry peal as the bride and bridegroom should come out.

A murmur from the church announced them; out they came. Byles was right. John Charrington did not look himself. There was dust on his coat, his hair was disarranged. He seemed to have been in some row, for there was a black mark above his eyebrow. He was deathly pale. But his pallor was not greater than that of the bride, who might have been carved in ivory—dress, veil, orange-blossoms, face and all.

As they passed out, the ringers stooped—there were six of them—and then, on the ears expecting the gay wedding peal, came the slow tolling of the passing bell.

A thrill of horror at so foolish a jest from the ringers passed through us all. But the ringers themselves dropped the ropes and fled like rabbits out into the sunlight. The bride shuddered, and grey shadows came about her mouth, but the bridegroom led her on down the path where the people stood with handfuls of rice; but the handfuls were never thrown, and the wedding bells never rang. In vain the ringers were urged to remedy their mistake; they protested, with many whispered expletives, that they had not rung that bell; that they would see themselves further before they'd ring anything more that day.

In a hush, like the hush in a chamber of death, the bridal pair passed into their carriage and its door slammed behind them.

Then the tongues were loosed. A babel of anger, wonder, conjecture from the guests and the spectators.

'If I'd seen his condition, sir,' said old Foster to me as we drove off, 'I would have stretched him on the floor of the church, sir, by Heaven I would, before I'd have let him marry my daughter!'

Then he put his head out the window.

'Drive like hell,' he cried to the coachman; 'don't spare the horses.'

We passed the bride's carriage. I forebore to look at it, and old Foster turned his head away and swore.

We stood in the hall doorway, in the blazing afternoon sun, and in about half a minute we heard wheels crunching the gravel. When the carriage stopped in front of the steps, old Foster and I ran down.

'Great Heaven, the carriage is empty! And yet—'

I had the door open in a minute, and this is what I saw—

No sign of John Charrington; and of May, his wife, only a huddled heap of white satin, lying half on the floor of the carriage and half on the seat.

'I drove straight here, sir,' said the coachman, as the bride's father lifted her out, 'and I'll swear no one got out of the carriage.'

We carried her into the house in her bridal dress, and drew back her veil. I saw her face. Shall I ever forget it? White, white, and drawn with agony and horror, bearing such a look of terror as I have never seen since, except in dreams. And her hair, her radiant blonde hair, I tell you it was white like snow.

As we stood, her father and I, half mad with the horror and mystery of it, a boy came up the avenue—a telegraph boy. They brought the orange envelope to me. I tore it open.

'John Charrington was thrown from the dog-cart on his way to the station at half-past one. Killed on the spot.—BRANBRIDGE, Peasemarsch Place.'

And he was married to May Foster in our Parish Church at *half-past three*, in presence of half the parish!

'I shall be married on Thursday dead or alive!'

What had passed in that carriage on the homeward drive? No one knows—no one will ever know.

Before a week was over they laid her beside her husband in the churchyard where they had kept their love-trysts.

This is the true story of John Charrington's wedding.

Kharu Knows All

by Renier Wyers

Self-described as "The World's Greatest Medium," Tuan Kharu managed to eke out a fairly comfortable subsistence by swindling gullible people who sought communication with the dead. He lived in the hope that one day there would come to his murky, incense-laden séance-parlor an opulent victim from whom he could glean what he termed "important money."

Such a victim was waiting to see him now. Of this he felt certain as—with the trace of a leer on his swarthy and bewhiskered face—his beady black eyes read the name on the calling-card he held in his hand: "Mrs. Victoria Sanderson."

He had seen that name before. He stroked his black Mefistofelian

beard, nodded his turbaned head, and said in an affected oriental accent:

"Tell Madam that I am in meditation. I shall grant her a consultation as soon as I have finished. Begone!"

"Yes, sir." The youth who served as the man's only corporeal assistant, a combination office-boy and secretary, retreated from the parlor to the reception room, closing the door behind him.

The instructions, Kharu decided, would keep the woman in properly awesome suspense, while he prepared for the interview. He went about this preparation, humming a little tune. It was not, as one might have expected, an exotic strain from the mystic East, nor yet a spiritual hymn. It was *Happy Days Are Here Again*, a melody reminiscent of the days of his fraudulent stock and bond activities, when he was known as Tim Carewe, salesman of spurious securities.

He had, when stocketeering ceased to be profitable, applied his talents to his present fake mediumship. By changing his name and raising a mustache and beard, he had eluded his duped investors and outraged creditors. With the aid of a few books of occult lore, he became a sufficiently transformed personality to establish himself in his new business without leaving town.

"Happy days are here again, te-dum-tedum," he concluded as he studied the contents of his filing-cabinet. It contained, in alphabetical order, death notices clipped from the press. In a trice, he found what he wanted, a clipping only seven days old. He compared it with the calling-card and chuckled. The clipping bore the words:

"Sanderson—Joseph L. Sanderson, beloved husband of Victoria. Funeral from late residence, 1087 Astor Street, June 5th." This was pasted on an index card on which was penciled, "See General News File."

The swindler's beady eyes gleamed, for this notation meant that the deceased had been prominent enough to "rate" an obituary in the news columns. Yes, here it was, a brief biography of Joseph L. Sanderson, wealthy, retired lumber dealer. The item was illustrated with a one-column, half-tone reproduction of a photograph portraying a firm, leonine face, a broad forehead under a thick mane of snow-white hair.

Kharu studied the clippings a moment, then put them away and darkened the room by drawing the long window-drapes together. He turned a light switch. The effect of these maneuvers was a dim, cery light in which nothing was clearly discernible. The smoking incense-burners enhanced the mystery of the atmosphere. It was one in which

susceptible people could easily delude themselves into believing that they were in the presence of the wraiths and souls of their departed loved ones summoned here by the self-acclaimed supernatural powers of the Great Kharu. He seated himself in a throne-like chair behind the massive table on which reposed a huge crystal globe. He adjusted his turban and pressed a buzzer.

Mrs. Victoria Sanderson, elderly and bent, was escorted in by the medium's assistant. He left her standing timidly in the center of the séance-parlor and backed out, closing the door softly. She peered about her and gasped, as from a deep shadow Kharu rose majestically to his feet. He was draped in a flowing robe of blood-red silk. He stepped from behind the table, swept forward, bowed low over the timid little woman's hand and said in soothing, sympathetic tones:

"My dear Madam Sanderson! I am honored. Pray be seated here before the crystal and compose yourself. Do not speak until you are ready. I feel with you, and deeply, the sorrow that grips your heart in these dark days of bereavement. But your sorrow will be lightened. I know, for Kharu knows all. Only yesterday, during my hour of meditation there appeared to my vision the face of a kindly man, a good man, with snow-white hair, who whispered to me, 'Victoria will come. Tell Victoria not to grieve too deeply, for death is merely one's passing through a door to a better world. I am happy here in the spirit realm and I want her to be happy, too.' Those, Madam, are the very words the spirit spoke to me."

The aged woman's face was lighted with hope. "That was Joseph!" she exclaimed excitedly. "It's true! The dead do live again! He always said so. His friends never knew it, but he was deeply interested in psychic phenomena. He often told me that if he died first he'd come back or send a message to me. I did not think of that until last night when I saw your advertisement in *The Neighborhood Observer* and decided to come here."

"He guided you, caused you to read my announcement," said the Great Kharu solemnly.

He was pleased to note that the woman was even more impressionable than she had at first appeared. Recently widowed, with no kin in whom she could confide, she was pathetically eager to believe that there could be a return of the soul of the man who had been everything to her. As she spoke, she unwittingly revealed things which, when repeated to her in a different phraseology a few minutes later by Kharu, filled her with reverent awe.

"You are a great man, Kharu," she said after the séance.

He modestly bowed in acknowledgment.

Within a few weeks, she was entirely under his influence. Gradually the control of the fortune her husband had bequeathed to her slipped into the greedy fingers of the faker. He had scores of devices for parting her from her money. At his word, she contributed to him sums of cash and checks, for non-existent "causes and uplifts". She donated fifty thousand dollars to help him found an "Institute of Psychic Research". Of this sum he actually spent a few dollars for blue-prints and a prospectus. The rest he banked under his own name.

He poisoned her mind against the counsel of well-meaning acquaintances who admonished her not to be so reckless with her inheritance. He succeeded in his designs by convincing her that all his suggestions as to her investments came from her dead husband. Several times he had caused the spirit of Joseph L. Sanderson to appear before her in the darkness of the séance-parlor. She did not know that what she saw was a stereopticon projection of a slide made from the newspaper picture of the deceased. Kharu so cleverly concealed the lantern and arranged the lighting effects that his own sheeted body, moving slightly under the drape on which the picture was projected, seemed part of the specter that bore a strong leonine head crowned with a thick shock of snow-white hair.

"I speak through the voice of Kharu," said the specter. "Kharu knows all. He is our friend. Give him power of attorney. Place all your possessions in his care."

This message and others in a similar vein produced excellent results for Kharu. Within a year he had bled the woman penniless.

"What shall I do now, Kharu?" she asked tearfully. "I am facing eviction from the apartment in which Joseph and I spent so many happy years. The tradesmen are dunning me. And now you say that the money I entrusted to you is all gone!"

"Yes," said Kharu coldly. "Most of the investments recommended by the spirit of your departed husband are hopelessly lost." The faker knew from experience that the quickest way of getting rid of fleeced victims was to be "hard-boiled" about it.

"But I gave you—"

"You forced the money on me, Madam!" He glared hostilely.

"But can't you help me? Please! Ask Joseph—he would help me."

"I've been unable to get in communication with the spirit of Joseph L. Sanderson for some time. Perhaps he is angry that you have wasted your inheritance by living beyond your means. Whatever the cause, silence is the only effect of my recent attempts to evoke his spirit. It's

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strange, but"—he shrugged—"it's the way of the occult world." He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"I have another appointment," he lied. "Will you come to see me some other time? I shall be glad to give you another consultation—at the usual price."

She fumbled with her gloves, staring at him rheumy-eyed, apparently too dulled by the dread of bleak poverty to comprehend. "I said that I have another appointment," he rasped. "Please get out!"

The very next morning after this interview, Kharu dismissed his assistant and closed his office doors for ever. By evening he was ensconced in his new quarters in a penthouse thirty-eight stories above Lake Shore Drive. Gone were his mustache and beard. Gone were the turban and flowing robes. He was his old self again, Tim Carewe, sleeker, more dapper, and richer than ever before. Smoking a fifty-cent cigar, he strolled proudly through the apartment, only half listening to the expensive radio in the ornate living-room. The radio voice, racing against time, rattled on:

"—the body of the suicide who leapt to her death in the Chicago River from the Michigan Avenue bridge last midnight was recovered today and identified as that of Mrs. Victoria Sanderson, widow of the late Joseph L. Sanderson, millionaire lumber dealer who died at almost the same hour, the same day, exactly a year ago. You have just heard 'News Flashes' from Station WLS. We return to our studios where Finney Briggs and his orchestra are playing—"

Carewe leapt to the instrument and switched off the current. "God!" he muttered. "I didn't think she'd do that."

But the shock was only momentary. He shook it off with a shrug of his shoulders. Too bad! She had been such a "lovely mooch". So easy to "take". With the cigar held at a cocky angle in his smug, oily face, he plunged his hands into his pockets and strolled leisurely out through the French doors onto the terrace. Ah, this was glorious!—this sense of being on top of the world, literally and figuratively. He leaned on the parapet, gazing out over the blackness of Lake Michigan and the stars overhead. Directly below him some four hundred feet down, two streams of autos flowed past each other, almost in silence; for at this great height the hum of motors and swish of rubber on concrete was barely audible.

This quietness, this remoteness from the mundane life below, however, instead of having a soothing effect, began—after a few moments—to give him a sensation of uneasiness, a tinge of scalp-tickling fear. The palms of his hands grew moist with sweat. He felt that he was

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being watched. He whirled about. What he saw caused him to cringe back against the parapet in terror.

There on the tiled terrace, between him and the French doors, stood an elderly pair. The woman was small and bent, the man stocky. From his broad shoulders protruded a short, stout neck above which was a firm leonine face under a thick shock of white hair.

Tim Carewe stared and stared but could not stare his visitors away.

His throat muscles tightened in fear. "Mrs. Sanderson," he barely managed to whisper huskily, "who—what—" He could not finish. He ran his hand over his face as though to brush away what he saw. It was a futile gesture. The pair was approaching him, drawing ever nearer. This thing could not be!

"Go away, go away!" he screamed. "You're dead, both of you! You can't come back like this! I know. I'm Kharu, the World's Greatest Spirit Medium. Kharu knows all. I know there are no ghosts. It's all a racket, I tell you. A racket!"

Still the bent little woman and the stocky old man approached him. They were not walking—yet they moved toward the cowering figure of the once dapper Tim Carewe.

A horrible obsession seized his brain; it was that if this pair touched him he would become as they, shadowy, unreal, not of this earth and flesh. The obsession drove reason from his mind, as inch by inch the figures wafted forward. He scrambled up onto the ledge of the parapet.

The pair was now directly before and below him. The short, stocky man's firm leonine face under the shock of white hair glared up at him, relentlessly and coldly. The little, bent woman shook her head sadly. From the tile, the figures rose upward, wavering slightly like smoke in a current of air. Only their staring, accusing eyes remained steady. They bored deep into the brain of Tim Carewe.

He gibbered wildly and leapt into space.

The Last of Squire Ennismore

by Mrs. J. H. Riddell

“Did I see it myself? No, sir; I did not see it; and my father before me did not see it; nor his father before him, and he was Phil Regan, just the same as myself. But it is true, for all that; just as true as that you are looking at the very place where the whole thing happened. My great-grandfather (and he did not die till he was ninety-eight) used to tell, many and many’s the time, how he met the stranger, night after night, walking lonesome-like about the sands where most of the wreckage came ashore.”

“And the old house, then, stood behind that belt of Scotch firs?”

“Yes; and a fine house it was, too. Hearing so much talk about it when a boy, my father said, made him often feel as if he knew every room in the building, though it had all fallen to ruin before he was born. None of the family ever lived in it after the squire went away. Nobody else could be got to stop in the place. There used to be awful noises, as if something was being pitched from the top of the great staircase down in to the hall; and then there would be a sound as if a hundred people were clinking glasses and talking all together at once. And then it seemed as if barrels were rolling in the cellars; and there would be screeches, and howls, and laughing, fit to make your blood run cold. They say there is gold hid away in the cellars; but not one has ever ventured to find it. The very children won’t come here to play; and when the men are plowing the field behind, nothing will make them stay in it, once the day begins to change. When the night is coming on, and the tide creeps in on the sand, more than one thinks he has seen mighty queer things on the shore.”

“But what is it really they think they see? When I asked my landlord to tell me the story from beginning to end, he said he could not remember it; and, at any rate, the whole rigmarole was nonsense, put together to please strangers.”

“And what is he but a stranger himself? And how should he know the doings of real quality like the Ennismores? For they were gentry, every one of them—good old stock; and as for wickedness, you might

have searched Ireland through and not found their match. It is a sure thing, though, that if Riley can't tell you the story, I can; for, as I said, my own people were in it, of a manner of speaking. So, if your honour will rest yourself off your feet, on that bit of a bank, I'll set down my creel and give you the whole pedigree of how Squire Ennismore went away from Ardwinsagh."

It was a lovely day, in the early part of June; and, as the Englishman cast himself on a low ridge of sand, he looked over Ardwinsagh Bay with a feeling of ineffable content. To his left lay the Purple Headland; to his right, a long range of breakers, that went straight out into the Atlantic till they were lost from sight; in front lay the Bay of Ardwinsagh, with its bluish-green water sparkling in the summer sunlight, and here and there breaking over some sunken rock, against which the waves spent themselves in foam.

"You see how the current's set, Sir? That is what makes it dangerous for them as doesn't know the coast, to bathe here at any time, or walk when the tide is flowing. Look how the sea is creeping in now, like a race-horse at the finish. It leaves that tongue of sand bars to the last, and then, before you could look round, it has you up to the middle. That is why I made bold to speak to you; for it is not alone on the account of Squire Ennismore the bay has a bad name. But it is about him and the old house you want to hear. The last mortal being that tried to live in it, my great-grandfather said, was a creature, by name Molly Leary; and she had neither kith nor kin, and begged for her bite and sup, sheltering herself at night in a turf cabin she had built at the back of a ditch. You may be sure she thought herself a made woman when the agent said, 'Yes: she might try if she could stop in the house; there was peat and bog-wood,' he told her, 'and half-a-crown a week for the winter, and a golden guinea once Easter came,' when the house was to be put in order for the family; and his wife gave Molly some warm clothes and a blanket or two; and she was well set up.

"You may be sure she didn't choose the worst room to sleep in; and for a while all went quiet, till one night she was wakened by feeling the bedstead lifted by the four corners and shaken like a carpet. It was a heavy four-post bedstead, with a solid top: and her life seemed to go out of her with the fear. If it had been a ship in a storm off the Headland, it couldn't have pitched worse and then, all of a sudden, it was dropped with such a bang as nearly drove the heart into her mouth.

"But that, she said, was nothing to the screaming and laughing, and hustling and rushing that filled the house. If a hundred people had

been running hard along the passages and tumbling downstairs, they could not have made greater noise.

“Molly never was able to tell how she got clear of the place; but a man coming late home from Ballycloyne Fair found the creature crouched under the old thorn there, with very little on her—saving your honour’s presence. She had a bad fever, and talked about strange things, and never was the same woman after.”

“But what was the beginning of all this? When did the house first get the name of being haunted?”

“After the old Squire went away: that was what I purposed telling you. He did not come here to live regularly till he had got well on in years. He was near seventy at the time I am talking about; but he held himself as upright as ever, and rode as hard as the youngest; and could have drunk a whole roomful under the table, and walked up to bed as unconcerned as you please at the dead of the night.

“He was a terrible man. You couldn’t lay your tongue to a wickedness he had not been in the forefront of—drinking, duelling, gambling,—all manner of sins had been meat and drink to him since he was a boy almost. But at last he did something in London so bad, so beyond the beyonds, that he thought he had best come home and live among people who did not know so much about his goings on as the English. It was said that he wanted to try and stay in this world for ever; and that he had got some secret drops that kept him well and hearty. There was something wonderful queer about him, anyhow.

“He could hold foot with the youngest; and he was strong, and had a fine fresh colour in his face; and his eyes were like a hawk’s; and there was not a break in his voice—and him near upon threescore and ten!

“At last and at long last it came to be the March before he was seventy—the worst March ever known in all these parts—such blowing, sleeting, snowing, had not been experienced in the memory of man; when one blustering night some foreign vessel went to bits on the Purple Headland. They say it was an awful sound to hear the deathcry that went up high above the noise of the wind; and it was as bad a sight to see the shore there strewed with corpses of all sorts and sizes, from the little cabin-boy to the grizzled seaman.

“They never knew who they were or where they came from, but some of the men had crosses, and beads, and such like, so the priest said they belonged to him, and they were all buried deeply and decently in the chapel graveyard.

“There was not much wreckage of value drifted on shore. Most of what is lost about the Head stays there; but one thing did come into the bay—a puncheon of brandy.

"The Squire claimed it; it was his right to have all that came on his land, and he owned this sea-shore from the Head to the breakers—every foot—so, in course, he had the brandy; and there was sore illwill because he gave his men nothing, not even a glass of whiskey.

"Well, to make a long story short, that was the most wonderful liquor anybody ever tasted. The gentry came from far and near to take share, and it was cards and dice, and drinking and story-telling night after night—week in, week out. Even on Sundays, God forgive them! The officers would drive over from Ballyclone, and sit emptying tumbler after tumbler till Monday morning came, for it made beautiful punch.

"But all at once people quit coming—a word went round that the liquor was not all it ought to be. Nobody could say what ailed it, but it got about that in some way men found it did not suit them.

"For one thing, they were losing money very fast.

"They could not make head against the Squire's luck, and a hint was dropped the puncheon ought to have been towed out to sea, and sunk in fifty fathoms of water.

"It was getting to the end of April, and fine, warm weather for the time of year, when first one and then another, and then another still, began to take notice of a stranger who walked the shore alone at night. He was a dark man, the same colour as the drowned crew lying in the chapel graveyard, and had rings in his ears, and wore a strange kind of hat, and cut wonderful antics as he walked, and had an ambling sort of gait, curious to look at. Many tried to talk to him, but he only shook his head; so, as nobody could make out where he came from or what he wanted, they made sure he was the spirit of some poor wretch who was tossing about the Head, longing for a snug corner in holy ground.

"The priest went and tried to get some sense out of him.

" 'Is it Christian burial you're wanting?' asked his reverence; but the creature only shook his head.

" 'Is it word sent to the wives and daughters you've left orphans and widows, you'd like?' But no; it wasn't that.

" 'Is it for sin committed you're doomed to walk this way? Would masses comfort ye? There's a heathen,' said his reverence; 'Did you ever hear tell of a Christian that shook his head when masses were mentioned?'

" 'Perhaps he doesn't understand English, Father,' says one of the officers who was there; 'Try him with Latin.'

"No sooner said than done. The priest started off with such a string of aves and paters that the stranger fairly took to his heels and ran.

“ ‘He is an evil spirit,’ explained the priest, when he stopped, tired out, ‘and I have exorcised him.’

“But next night my gentleman was back again, as unconcerned as ever.

“ ‘And he’ll just have to stay,’ said his reverence, ‘For I’ve got lumbago in the small of my back, and pains in all my joints—never to speak of a hoarseness with standing there shouting; and I don’t believe he understood a sentence I said.’

“Well, this went on for a while, and people got that frightened of the man, or appearance of a man, they would not go near the sand; till in the end, Squire Ennismore, who had always scoffed at the talk, took it into his head he would go down one night, and see into the rights of the matter. He, maybe, was feeling lonesome, because, as I told your honour before, people had left off coming to the house, and there was nobody for him to drink with.

“Out he goes, then, bold as brass; and there were a few followed him. The man came forward at sight of the Squire and took off his hat with a foreign flourish. Not to be behind in civility, the Squire lifted his.

“ ‘I have come, sir,’ he said, speaking very loud, to try to make him understand, ‘to know if you are looking for anything, and whether I can assist you to find it.’

“The man looked at the Squire as if he had taken the greatest liking to him, and took off his hat again.

“ ‘Is it the vessel that was wrecked you are distressed about?’

“There came no answer, only a mournful shake of the head.

“ ‘Well, *I* haven’t your ship, you know; it went all to bits months ago; and, as for the sailors, they are snug and sound enough in consecrated ground.’

“The man stood and looked at the Squire with a queer sort of smile on his face.

“ ‘What *do* you want?’ asked Mr. Ennismore in a bit of a passion. ‘If anything belonging to you went down with the vessel, it’s about the Head you ought to be looking for it, not here—unless, indeed, its after the brandy you’re fretting!’

“Now, the Squire had tried him in English and French, and was now speaking a language you’d have thought nobody could understand; but, faith, it seemed natural as kissing to the stranger.

“ ‘Oh! That’s where you are from, is it?’ said the Squire. ‘Why couldn’t you have told me so at once? I can’t give you the brandy, because it mostly is drunk; but come along, and you shall have as stiff a glass of punch as ever crossed your lips.’ And without more to-do off

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they went, as sociable as you please, jabbering together in some outlandish tongue that made moderate folks' jaws ache to hear it.

"That was the first night they conversed together, but it wasn't the last. The stranger must have been the height of good company, for the Squire never tired of him. Every evening, regularly, he came up to the house, always dressed the same, always smiling and polite, and then the Squire called for brandy and hot water, and they drank and played cards till cock-crow, talking and laughing into the small hours.

"This went on for weeks and weeks, nobody knowing where the man came from, or where he went; only two things the old housekeeper did know—that the puncheon was nearly empty, and that the Squire's flesh was wasting off him; and she felt so uneasy she went to the priest, but he could give her no manner of comfort.

"She got so concerned at last that she felt bound to listen at the dining-room door; but they always talked in that foreign gibberish, and whether it was blessing or cursing they were at she couldn't tell.

"Well, the upshot of it came one night in July—on the eve of the Squire's birthday—there wasn't a drop of spirit left in the puncheon—no, not as much as would drown a fly. They had drunk the whole lot clean up—and the old woman stood trembling, expecting every minute to hear the bell ring for more brandy, for where was she to get more if they wanted any?

"All at once the Squire and the stranger came out into the hall. It was a full moon, and light as day.

" 'I'll go home with you to-night by way of a change,' says the Squire.

" 'Will you so?' asked the other.

" 'That I will,' answered the Squire.

" 'It is your own choice, you know.'

" 'Yes; it is my own choice; let us go.'

"So they went. And the housekeeper ran up to the window on the great staircase and watched the way they took. Her niece lived there as housemaid, and she came and watched, too; and, after a while, the butler as well. They all turned their faces this way, and looked after their master walking beside the strange man along these very sands. Well, they saw them walk on, and on, and on, and on, till the water took them to their knees, and then to their waists, and then to their arm-pits, and then to their throats and their heads; but long before that the women and the butler were running out on the shore as fast as they could, shouting for help."

"Well?" said the Englishman.

"Living or dead, Squire Ennismore never came back again. Next

morning, when the tides ebbed again, one walking over the sand saw the print of a cloven foot—that he tracked to the water's edge. Then everybody knew where the Squire had gone, and with whom."

"And no more search was made?"

"Where would have been the use searching?"

"Not much, I suppose. It's a strange story, anyhow."

"But true, your honour—every word of it."

"Oh! I have no doubt of that," was the satisfactory reply.

The Light Was Green

by John Rawson Speer

Sudden madness at seventy miles an hour! Alone in the cab of a locomotive with a madman. Will Bryant, the engineer of the Fire Flyer, was insane. But why?

What had suddenly turned this man I had worked with for over six years, and had known as a quiet, steady-going person, into the raving madman I now saw before me?

His eyes violent, his face contorted with fear, he was cowering there in the cab, pleading with some invisible presence. For a paralyzing instant I felt that presence. But there was no time to lose. As the fireman of the Fire Flyer, I would have to assume Will's responsibility. There was no time to ask questions. I had to get to the throttle of that locomotive.

As I rushed to him from my side of the cab, he suddenly seized a shovel and struck me over the head. Blood trickled into my eyes, blurring my vision, and then I slipped away into unconsciousness with only a fading but horrible picture of Will Bryant, insane.

What happened after that in the cab of that engine, pulling a train-load of passengers seventy miles an hour, terrifies me constantly.

When I regained my senses after the blow Will had given me, I found him staring at the steam gage, and gibbering like an idiot. The air was set on the brakes, and the Flyer was pulled in alongside the main track, waiting for Number 93 to pass her.

I must have been unconscious for fully fifteen minutes. During that time the Fire Flyer had thundered on her way with no one at the throttle—unless it was, as Will Bryant swears, the spirit of Nat Carson. Nat Carson had been dead for ten years!

There was nothing to do but turn Will over to the authorities, who committed him to an asylum.

Although I had been his closest friend, there were things in his life which he had never mentioned, even to me. The doctors, after much deliberation, decided remorse, coupled with a deep sense of guilt, had caused Will to have this intense belief in the return of the dead. I followed their theories with interest, and for some time believed that he would eventually realize that only his worry-ridden mind had produced the sight he claimed he saw in the cab that night.

But I know now that Will Bryant will never recover. The last visit I had with him made me see how hopeless it was. Some of the fear that comes to lock him in delirious madness now attaches itself to me.

I can still see him, the way he looked that last day I talked to him in Terrington Asylum; his eyes dull, a hopeless sorrow showing from within them as he said:

“Steve, I am sane, as sane as any man, but I can never take my place in normal society again. Don’t you think I have tried to convince myself that there was nothing unnatural about that night? I’ve gone over every detail of the affair, but the result is always the same: Nat Carson, dead though he may have been, sat in the cab of our engine; he pulled that train, and I know what he intended to do. I know, Steve! He was there. I saw him, I tell you. I did! I did!”

“Will, please!” I gripped his shaking hands and held them tightly. “Don’t talk or think about it if it disturbs you. I only want to help you. I want to see you well again so that you can leave this place.”

Will shook his head sadly.

“I don’t want to leave here now, Steve. I feel safer here where they can watch me at night. I have a room here, Steve, where there are no train whistles blasting in my ears.

“Steve, I’m going to tell you everything, just as I see it. They call me crazy, but that is because they have no other term for my affliction. It is not really insanity; ‘haunted’ is the word.

“You remember hearing about the train wreck I was in ten years ago? As you know, Nat Carson was the engineer who allowed his train to run by a signal supposed to be set against him. I was firing for him then. See these scars on my arms—all from that wreck. We crashed through the rear of a freight train, plowed through a chain of box-cars

as if they had been mere cigar boxes. Both of us missed death for no other reason than that it wasn't our time to go.

"At the Board of Investigation, I told them what I believed I should. I told them that Nat had been drinking a little. He did take chances, unforgivable chances like that. I used to warn him that some day he would be caught. Nat could be drunk and still not show it. Of course the fact that I was in love with his girl and had never really liked him had something to do with my testimony.

"At the trial he claimed he saw the signal as green. He swore the red signal set against us was green, and that I was a liar. 'You're sending me to hell!' he cried. But I stuck to my testimony.

"You know the rest; two weeks later Nat Carson killed himself. I tried to believe like all the others that he had done it because he realized the crime he had committed in risking the lives of all those passengers.

"The years went on. I was promoted to engineer, a regular 'hog head' with my own train to pull. I seldom thought of Nat any more; only when stories of that wreck were recalled would I think of him. That was only natural.

"Not until one night in the yards, years later, did I come face to face with what has doomed me. I had checked my engine over to the round-house hostler and was walking across to the dispatcher's shack. The steam and smoke from the trains was all mixed up with the fog that was settling down over the yards. Brakemen's lanterns were bobbing in and out among the cars. You know how it is on foggy nights in the yards. I wasn't paying much attention to anything when, out of that fog, a face leered at me, then vanished. It was quick, so quick that, although I was frightened, I did not believe I had actually seen it. Surely I had only imagined that I saw Nat Carson.

" 'What am I thinking about?' I asked myself; even laughed a little. 'Must be seeing ghosts,' I said, and went on into the dispatcher's office.

"I didn't think any more about it. That's how much it meant to me then. People are often imagining that they see faces of those who are dead. They're like flashes, quick pictures from the subconscious mind.

"Two nights later, at the other end of the run, I saw a figure walking toward me. I noticed it particularly because it seemed intent upon walking right through me. It was under a street lamp on the corner near my home. This time it did not disappear, and there was no doubt in my mind as to who it was. He stood there sneering at me, Steve! I couldn't move or talk as he eyed me with contempt, moved around me, and finally walked on down the street.

"All that night I tried to tell myself that it was only my imagination playing tricks. But why should it?

"For weeks I would see Nat Carson, always at night, usually in the yards or around my home. It was then that I began thinking of the testimony I had given at the Board of Investigation.

"That Nat Carson was trying to communicate with me from beyond the borders of this life seemed the only conclusion to draw. That he was accusing me of his death, there was no doubt.

"The last night before the thing really happened, I was looking at a green switch-lantern. A voice whispered in my ear: 'It's green! Green like the night we crashed that freight. Green, I tell you!'

"I turned and saw Nat Carson's face. I called out to him, but he turned and ran. From then on I could feel his presence all around me.

"You remember how you looked at me when I climbed into the cab that last night I took the run, Steve? I felt that somewhere on that train Nat Carson was hiding, waiting to confront me. Just before we pulled out I was on the verge of getting out of the cab and leaving the train.

" 'A-b-o-a-r-d!' I heard the conductor drawl. From force of habit, I started my train.

"Slow at first (I never jerked the Flyer, you know that), easy, evenly we started. I dreaded to see the lights from the station moving by. Gradually faster, yard lights, crossings, twinkling stars—green signals—open country! The Fire Flyer was on its way.

"The headlight's gleaming spear of silver shot through the darkness; wheels clicked over track joints; a crossing whistled by. She was rolling smoothly, powerfully on.

" 'Green!' I called to you from my side of the cab when I saw the signal.

" 'Green!' you answered back to me when you saw it. And from somewhere I heard that damned voice: 'It's green, green like that night we crashed into that freight!'

"I tried to control myself, tried to throw out the thoughts that were crowding into my brain. But as we rolled along, I found myself thinking: 'This *is* like the night we went through those box-cars!'

"Again I felt that cold breath upon my neck, eyes peering into my back. I turned, but no one was there—only the swaying coaches, and you down on the bridge tending your fire.

"Pulling myself together again, I peered straight ahead at the glistening track. Another green signal! 'Nat! Nat!' Each clack of steel upon steel seemed to sing out, 'Nat! Nat!'

"Again that voice, the feeling of his presence behind me. I wanted

to cry out, to stop the train, and search for that voice. Conscience? I tried to tell myself that it should not bother me. Why didn't he leave me alone to run my train? I wasn't fit to highball a fast locomotive over the road with such voices, such icy breaths upon my back.

"Gladly I welcomed the lights of a station, the first station on the run. I wanted to climb down out of the cab and remain there. Something horrible, I knew, lay ahead of me on that lone stretch of track. It was impossible to confess to you how I felt. Words would not come to me, Steve.

"Miles yet ahead, miles of torture. Would daylight never come? Perhaps that might drive away the awful fear.

"Speeding again in the country, only the lights from the interlocker towers five miles apart, only an occasional farmhouse with a lonely lamp lit. Shadows on the hills, creeping shadows, and that chilling breath, that voice: 'Green! It was green!'

"This time the voice seemed louder, much more real and certain. Only by sheer force of mind could I keep my back turned to it.

"It came again! I had to look. A grim, awful-looking face was staring at me from the tender. I swear it was Nat Carson, and he spoke to me. Somehow I mumbled the words: 'Nat, where in God's name did you come from?'

" 'From the blinds maybe,' he laughed. 'Maybe I been ridin' 'em all night waitin' for this little stretch of track. Ten years since we rode side by side in the cab of an engine, ain't it? Ten years ago tonight we were ridin' along this same old road, you an' me. Only difference was that I was settin' at the throttle and you was tossin' coal into the belly of the old hog.

" 'Watchin' your signals, pal? Crack train you're pullin' now. How's it feel to be settin' there watchin' the drivers go up and down?'

"He moved toward me. I screamed because I couldn't help it. I wanted to beat out the sight of that leering face. It must have been at that time that I struck you with the shovel, Steve, although I do not remember that. All I know is that Nat Carson, who was dead, who had been dead all those years, was now climbing onto my seat in the cab. Nothing I could do would make him go away.

"I saw him climb up onto the seat and take hold of the throttle. He said, 'I'm pullin' this train tonight. She's my train again!'

"I tried to push him away. 'Nat, you're crazy!' I cried.

" 'Crazy!' He laughed as his fingers pulled the throttle out, and the locomotive bellowed with the force of steam driving its wheels on to greater speed.

" 'Yes, crazy! I've been crazy ever since that night when I saw the

signal green. Then those cars . . . remember how we piled into 'em? Remember how the old 789 looked when she bit through that "crumm," plowed off the track, and dug her pilot into the dirt? Remember!

" 'Nat, watch those signals!' I begged. 'Let me up there, Nat. Take your punishment out on me, but don't risk the lives of others.'

"The Flyer hit a sharp curve, bounced uncertainly from side to side a moment, then fled madly down the track.

" 'Ten years ago,' Nat began slowly, 'ten years ago we both saw that signal green. But you lied! You lied to make me lose my job, to lose Lucille because you wanted her, and because you hated me. You told them about my drinking. In every way you put the blame of that wreck upon my soul. I thought I could escape it when I sought death, but it was still there. And now you're going to pay for every moment of doubt and torture. Tonight we celebrate the tenth anniversary of that wreck!'

" 'What are you going to do?' I asked hoarsely.

" 'What am I going to do? He gave the throttle another pull. 'I'm going to pull the Flyer tonight. Somewhere along this road there's a red signal set against us, and we're going by it, seventy miles an hour we're going by it!'

" 'No, Nat! No! You can't do this!'

" 'Seventy, eighty miles an hour we're going by it,' he chanted. 'And then, if you live, try to tell the Board of Investigation why you went by that danger signal. Try to tell them that a man who has been dead for ten years forced you to run by that signal. Listen to them laugh as you tell your crazy story. See the doubt on their faces as I saw it when I tried to tell them the signal was green.'

"Giving the throttle one final jerk, he sent the locomotive roaring like some wounded animal charging blindly to its own destruction.

"He sang out: 'The Flyer to Hell! No signals—clear track! Red means green, and green means nothing. A dead man at the throttle, pulling the fastest train that ever polished steel. We're on our way. We're highballing it to hell!'

"On we roared, with all those passengers slumbering in the Pullmans or chatting and talking. All of them innocently riding behind an engine headed for death—pulled by death itself!

"I closed my eyes and tried to pray. I don't know how long I stood there or what went on after that. The next thing I remember was hearing the scream of the whistle, the sound of the air being set on the brakes, the flanges biting into the wheels, and the train groaning to a stop.

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"When I looked we were pulled onto a siding at Elva. Far ahead on the track beside us I could hear a train coming at full speed. It was Number 93. Before we left the last station there had been no orders to pull onto the siding to let 93 go by.

"All that time, Steve, our train had been out of our hands. You were unconscious; I was helpless. Someone pulled that train onto the siding! Who, Steve, who?"

Will was shaking now. Terror, relived, had made him a trembling, sobbing wreck.

"But, Will, if the spirit of Nat Carson intended to destroy that train, why did we find it safely side-tracked to permit another train to pass us as per changed-schedule?" I tried to reason with him, for my sake as well as his own, for now even I felt that perhaps it was true.

"There is only one answer," Will replied brokenly. "Nat Carson stopped at the last station before Elva and received orders side-tracking us. No matter what revenge he had planned for me, something would not let him kill the others. He took that train onto the siding, left it standing there, and went away; his revenge was realized. Just as I had sent him for ever from the cab of an engine, so he has sent me.

"Nat Carson pulled that train. Nat Carson's dead but he pulled that train. He still comes back to remind me that I sent him to hell! He'll come tonight, and tomorrow night, and every night of my life. Oh, God, help me!"

Will broke into uncontrollable sobbing. The attendants were rushing to him. Nothing I could say would calm him.

"Nat Carson's dead! I sent him to hell. He pulled that train. He came back to pull that train. Nat Carson returned from the dead!"

As I started to go, a thought came to me; a brilliant thought it seemed at the time. Those orders, received at the last station before the side-track at Elva, had to be signed! Will must have signed them. Surely he had only gone into a trance of terror and imagined all he told me. If those orders were signed with Will's name they would prove everything to him. I would be able to recognize his signature no matter how shaken he might have been when he signed it.

I hurried to the station dispatcher, and, running through his orders, I found the date of Will's last run.

My heart stopped, then began beating wildly.

The signature on those orders was Nat Carson's!

Notes

A series of horizontal lines for writing notes. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page, providing a template for handwritten text.

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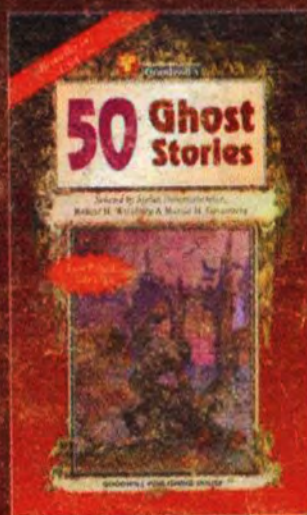
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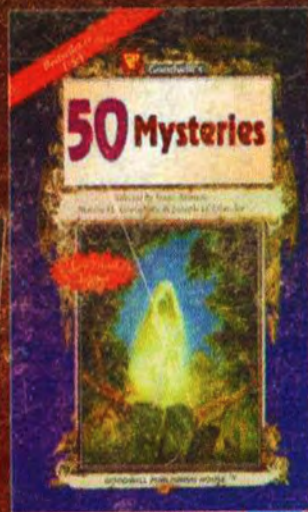
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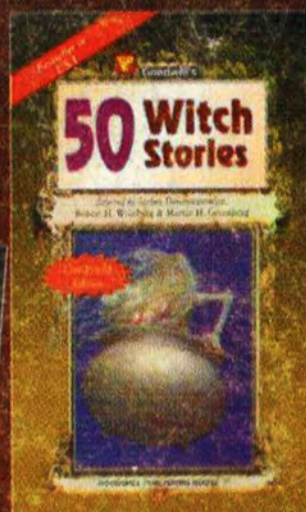
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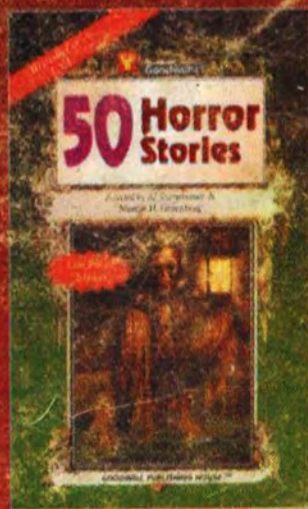
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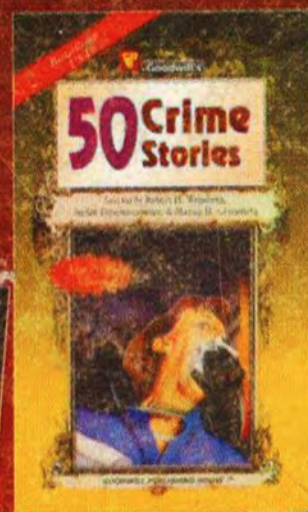
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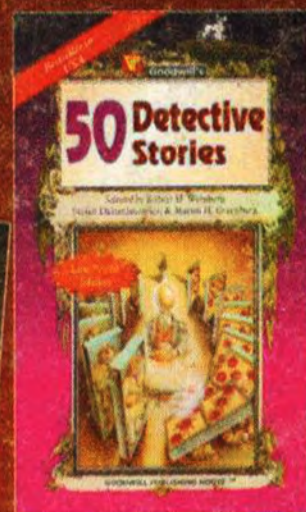
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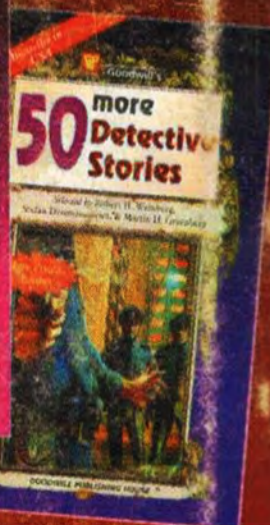
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